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Practitioner Inquiry Project report template

For current students

Use this template to write up your project report, before copying/pasting your responses into the matching fields on the New Project Form. You will find this by clicking the "Add New Project" button, visible on your profile page once you have logged in to the website here: <https://www.froebel.ed.ac.uk/login/> Publication here is required before you can be certificated for your participation in the programme.

Project title

8 words maximum

Valuing Artistic Exploration and Process in Children's Creativity

Subtitle (if applicable)

N/A

Project summary (for website search results) (30 words maximum)

Briefly describe the topic or key issue(s) your project was looking at

Example: An observational study of whether 3 and 4 year olds of different genders favour similar or different schemas in their block play.

A study into how the materials offered to children and the space we use can promote creative exploration. Observation, focus groups and interviews examine what varied and rich creativity look like in the setting and how practice can be refined to support it.

Introduction (100 words approx)

Summarise the key focus of your project and the main issues you cover. Why do they matter? Please do NOT repeat detailed information here which should come later (e.g. your findings or methodology)

Example: This project looks at ABC... It takes into account XYZ factors / principal literature or policies. This enquiry matters because... My purpose in undertaking this work was to learn...

This research project looks at creative opportunities for children in our setting, focusing on visual art practice and provision in Wester Coates' art room. Creativity and process are discussed in relation to key Froebelian principles regarding play and creativity (Bruce, 2021 p. 69) and our practice is examined in relation to Realising the Ambition (Education Scotland, 2020, p.102-105). The project focuses on how children use the space and materials currently provided for them, taking into account collaborative working and practitioner interaction, but also examines children's thoughts on how the space and provision can be enhanced.

Context

What was the situation of your setting, practice or research subject when you **started** this project, in relation to the question you were exploring? This might point towards demographics, pedagogy, policy, a case study, day-to-day experiences or other key contexts. Please also reflect briefly on your own "positionality" (positive or other biases) in relation to your research subject. (200 words max)

At Wester Coates Nursery there is a dedicated art room for creative exploration and visual art making, though opportunities and materials are not constrained to this room. There is an array of materials available in this room for use. However, there were a number of niggles many staff members and children expressed about the space.

The approach was that children had open access to all materials in reach, however, there was suspicion that there was a lack of clarity for the children on access to materials in drawers and also their knowledge of the variety available.

Children often expressed frustration at projects and artworks going missing or finding that another child was 'adding' to them. Practitioners also expressed concerns about children's care for the materials, respect for the space and one another's art pieces.

As an arts graduate and specialist arts engagement educator this interested me. As a practitioner, I have experience working across many settings, educational and community spaces, galleries and studios. I have a breadth of knowledge of art spaces and a pre-existing view that art spaces must be well stocked with a range of high-quality materials, neatly presented and stored. This potential bias had to be considered to conduct the research.

Methodology

What unique things did you have to consider, and what choices did you make, about **the methods** you would use to carry out your project (150 words approx)

Children were observed in the art space at various time over several days, focusing on different children each time, alone or collaborating, creating a snapshot of their use of materials and space.

A second method was interviews. The group interview was held with selected children observed in the art space. Initially, this was held in a quiet room and structured as an informal interview with four simple questions. This did not produce much information and was uncomfortable for the children so the interview was terminated and methodology re-examined, supported by reading on best practice (Roberts-Holmes, 2018 p.160) These children later partook in a revised focus group held in the art room, creating a collaborative visual mapping of the art space that formed the basic structure of the interview. I asked follow-up questions on things children spoke about, drew, and interacted with. A practitioner interview was also held in the art space. This was an open-ended, informal interview conducted face-to-face with some starting questions as a structure. All interviews were audio recorded and then manually transcribed.

A final element was a small experiment, exhibiting the children's work in the nursery space. Parents/ carers were invited to view it and comment on the provision and creative opportunities in response to this exhibition. This was conducted through an anonymous comment sheet.

Ethics (150 words approx)

Briefly describe any ethical issues you had to consider before or during your research, in terms of protecting children or adult participants. What were the different sides of the issues (if applicable) and how you adapted your project to take account of them. Did these ethical considerations influence your work or practice in any positive ways?

Reluctance to participate was encountered in the interviewing stage. Although children had been asked if they wished to participate, and appeared to give informed consent, discomfort in the interview was detected and was responded to. I believe I failed to fully consider the children's understanding of what they were agreeing to and the pressure they may have felt to say yes to participating.

In the staff interview the practitioner gave full consent. They had concerns about being able to answer all the questions so I read them, explained any unclear terms, and created a calm and friendly rapport before establishing that they felt comfortable to begin audio recording the interview.

Parental consent was gained for all children.

Findings (400 words approx)

What did you learn? What did you observe first-hand (if applicable)? What did this reveal, or what new questions does it raise?

Observations led to rich information about how children used the space. Children spent prolonged periods on their artistic creations and often returned to work on projects over the day, developing ideas and extending their process and use of materials. *'Child A spent 15/20 minutes unbroken and focused time on the project. The child later returned to the project to add to it after sharing and showing their creation with other practitioners in different rooms'.*

When children were expressing ideas and developing creative processes, sharing, showing and discussing were found to be important. This occurred when children collaborated with each other and interacted with practitioners. Practitioners and children both were observed to instigate these exchanges.

'Collaboration was present from the start and the two planned to make a rocket... They discussed using a hammer and nails "for more buttons", they expressed pleasure in working together and divided up tasks: "I'll hammer if you get some beads", "I love working together!"'
'Child F engaged with a practitioner as soon as they walked into the space. "Do you want to do craft with me?" They then selected some crêpe paper and decided to make a bracelet for the practitioner. Child F communicated throughout... They asked the practitioner for input such as "Would you like this bit here or here?" Child M who was using the adjacent space for woodwork decided to join in with the creating and went to cut up some card to add to the bracelet... Throughout the interaction, the practitioner supported the children by asking extending questions such as "Where shall I wear it?" and "what will happen in the rain?"'

From the focus group, light was shed on what materials children were aware of and enjoyed using frequently, and which materials they felt were missing, 'I need quick-drying glue. There's no quick-drying glue.... I did not know that was in there [referring to materials stored in drawers].' Children were found to nearly always combine various materials and techniques, often in unexpected, unorthodox ways. For example, many observations showed children used woodwork alongside collage and many sought out a huge variety of textures in their pieces such as glues combined with paint, cotton wool and tape, nails into card, and corks lids and wrappers collaged into paintings. This was supported by the practitioner interview. "I think the children like using paint. I think they like to experiment with the thick paintbrushes and the thin paintbrushes. The other thing that I often observe is that they like the textures provided in the art area of thicker paint, thinner paint but particularly glue." Practitioners were observed to be actively supportive of experimental use of the materials. *"Wow this looks very interesting, I love the colours you used and there is swirls in the glue, I wonder how that will dry."* They were observed only to limit this in the interest of reasonably conserving materials, reminding children with phrases like *"thats enough glue in the pot."* Observations showed that in nearly all cases materials were not returned or cared for sustainably when children were not prompted.

Findings on how children and families value children's art and artistic process, as opposed to product, were harder to define. This may be because the question is too broad or needs further examination through further action research. Responses were limited, vague, and possibly shaped by their good manners. One comment mentioned the 'quality' of children's art which interested me, however the comment was ambiguous. Further detail and examination would be needed to discover more about parents' views and value judgements on their child's processes and finished artistic products. This need for further research was supported by a response in the practitioner interview: 'I don't know if it's stuffed in the bag and not taken out, which I hope would never happen but it does happen, we all lead busy lives. I wonder if the child then.. if that has an impact on the child, I don't know maybe that's another..maybe that's another research [project]!'

Conclusion/coda (100-150 words approx)

In a nutshell, what was the overall lesson? What might you do next?

The research has shown that children creatively benefit from the variety and free access to a wide variety of materials (Education Scotland, 2020, p.50), however more needs to be done to make access clear and promote care for materials. The project demonstrates that collaboration for the children at Wester Coates is important in their artistic projects, both with other children and with the practitioners to further their ideas and experimentation with artistic processes and materials (Bruce, 2004 p.24-25) More research is needed to learn about how families value their child's artistic process. Dissemination of this project and the sharing of the findings with families may open up opportunities to further this conversation, I plan to now focus my thought on how to extend and share this in a valuable and creative way.

References:

Bruce, T. (2004). *Cultivating Creativity in Babies, Toddlers and Young children*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Bruce, T. (2021). *Friedrich Froebel A Critical Introduction to Key Themes and Debates*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Great Britain. Education Scotland. (2020). *Realising the Ambition: Being Me* [online] Available at: <https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf> [Accessed 18 January 2024]

Roberts- Holmes, G. (2018). *Doing Your Early Years Research Project*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Add one standout quote that captures the essence of your experience/project (optional, 50 words max). This could be from relevant literature or an anonymised participant.

Sometimes children show no attachment to a painting or model they have made and show no interest in whether it is put on the wall as a display nor any inclination to take it home with them. At other times they do. Adults working with young children need to understand the difference between finger painting as a creative process when ideas are probably incubated, and an act of creation.' (Bruce, 2004 p.21)

We would like to include an image with your report when you come to publish it. Please attach this to the online form when you submit. You should secure permission from anyone featured in the image, and any images of children should be obscured/take from behind, so that they are not identifiable. Alternatively you may choose to photograph objects, or choose a free image from unsplash.com



- CONSENT OF PARTICIPANTS -

Have you secured all necessary consents, and anonymised all data, relating to participants and settings in your responses above, including for any photograph submitted with this report?

Yes

Your name	Poppy Richards
Setting / location	Wester Coates Nursery School
Your local authority	Edinburgh
Date submitted / revised	22/02/24