

**Magic Acorns First Steps EY Research and Development Project Report**  
**A Great Yarmouth Community Trust project supported by the Arts Council**  
**Project Grants programme**



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## Magic Acorns First Steps EY Research and Development Project Report



### Project Overview - 'Building a Community of Practice'

Magic Acorn First Steps was a research and development project that grew out of recommendations made by the Festival Bridge (FB) commissioned Early Years (EY) Mapping Study undertaken by Magic Acorns (MA) in 2017.

Great Yarmouth Community Trust (GYCT) worked in partnership with MA to deliver a 6 month programme of interlinked artistic, organisational and sector development work supported by the Arts Council England ACPG programme.

The project aimed to build a 'Community of Practice' around EY arts in the East by:

- developing cross-sector connectivity;
- igniting long-term sustainable partnerships;
- developing new ways of working.

Artistic activity placed children of 0-5 yrs and their families at the centre of an open and exploratory process in order to practically develop approaches. This included 3 creative residencies entitled 'Near and Far' which took place in EY settings and cultural spaces in deprived areas:

- 4 day Dark Room with Bridgwater Nursery and Bridgwater Arts Centre, Somerset as part of the Hopper programme in partnership with TakeArt & ChinaPlate 19th - 22nd June 2018;
- 2 x 5 day artists residencies in Norfolk with Priory Day and Pilling Park Nurseries in partnership with Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) - Time&Tide and Norwich Castle 1st - 5th October and 8th - 12th October 2018;
- world class CPD opportunity led by Paulo Rodrigues, Portugal 'Tuning, People, Birds and Flowers' hosted in partnership with Snape Maltings 27th & 28th October 2018;
- Acorn East Networking meetings hosted in partnership with Suffolk Libraries and Sainsbury Centre of Visual Art.

Magic Acorns is an emerging EY arts development organisation currently being nurtured by GYCT and supported by FB. Over the course of the project period MA has undertaken a process of organisational development become constituted as a Community Interest Company (CIC) with a proposed five year business plan.

## **Magic Acorns Business Plan**

AIM: To nurture creativity with young children and the communities who care for them.

MISSION:

CORE ROLE 1. Magic Acorns intends to utilise the combined expertise and networks embodied by its directors to create cutting edge creative artwork with and for young children and those who care for them.

There will be two strands of work

- Regular ongoing groups, services and gatherings where young children and those who care for them engage and participate in artist enabled activity designed to support their curiosity and development.
- Events, happenings and special moments in which young children and those who care for them engage and participate in artist enabled activity designed to inspire and delight.

CORE ROLE 2. Magic Acorns will use its creative mission to enable a wider development role: encouraging, developing, networking and advocating for an increase in high quality creative work with and for young children. This will include training and development opportunities for

- Artists
- Arts Organisations
- Early Years Workers

## **Magic Acorns Principles and Values**

- will operate for the benefit of children under five, their parents and children, to increase their access to high quality arts work to include: dance, music, visual arts, artefacts and museum collections, theatre, digital, writing, story-telling and other forms of creative engagement.
- acknowledges that quality may encompass a variety of practice and be related to a range of circumstances and contexts. However, Magic Acorns recognises that a hallmark of quality is learner- centred practice which views babies and children as discerning and with unique knowledges and abilities. High quality practice works assumes that we can learn *with* and *from* young children about what it means to be in the world.
- is committed to support artists and practitioners in the arts, to support them to develop high quality practice appropriate for young children.
- Magic Acorns will develop and run its own arts events, performances, workshops and installations. It may also collaborate with other organisations to develop new work.
- will develop research-based ongoing creative practice focussed on inclusion, supporting wellbeing and using the arts to support therapeutic interventions, such as speech and language development.
- aims to develop training and professional development for artists, early years workers and others concerned with developing the early arts sector.
- is committed to offering creative practitioners in the East a way to network with others to support their work. It will also aim to enrich the sector in this region with people, practice and examples from elsewhere across the UK and internationally when the opportunity presents.

MA understand the importance of building relationships, championing EY arts and advocating for the development of the sector in the Eastern region. This research and development project saw MA working in partnership with nursery settings and arts and cultural organisations and drawing inspiration from leading national and international models.

The Magic Acorns First Steps project responded directly to the FB commissioned EY Arts Activity Mapping Report recommendations through it's activity and enquiry, which included:

Urgent need to EY sector development and investment

- Creating a lead organisation to develop strands of work that are holistic and interlinked;

- Supporting key individuals and visionaries working in the region to drive development and change;
- Developing a progressive programme that provides opportunities for national and international practitioners to gather in the same space, thereby facilitating connectivity, and collaboration, and developing cross-sector partnerships and perspectives;
- Developing local accredited EY arts and creative skills continuing professional development (CPD) and training programmes that engage with a broad range of professional practitioners working in EY settings, with focus on those who do not have degree level qualifications;
- Building 'Communities of Practice', i.e. interdisciplinary and cross-sector partnerships which develop initiatives that respond to arts and education professionals, parents, community leaders and workers.

#### Encouraging artistic development

- Invest in arts practice that is open-ended, responsive and flexible, while also being underpinned by pedagogical theory and rigour;
- Develop the artist residency model to enable collaborative projects between lead artists, associate artists, children and families and settings;
- Incorporate reflection and evaluation into all artistic programmes;
- Broaden EY arts practice to include under-represented art forms;
- Encourage international collaborations to raise standards and inspire new ways of working.

#### **Magic Acorns First Steps Project Research Questions:**

- What can we learn about the constituents of a 'Community of Practice' around EY and how can Magic Acorns nurture cross-sector connectivity?
- How can Magic Acorns ignite sustainable partnerships and how do we ensure long-term benefit?
- What do we discover/learn when we put children at the centre of an open exploratory artistic process?
- What are the roles of materials and scenographic technologies in developing EY arts practice?
- What do we learn from the Near & Far residency model about processes and relationship building?

**Research Methods include** - observation, ongoing process documentation, feedback and reflective conversations collected via:

- note taking;
- video documentation;
- sound recordings;
- feedback questionnaires.

#### **Findings include:**

- a response to the MA First Steps research questions including feedback from the CPD led by Paulo Rodrigues at Snape Maltings;
- feedback from Acorn East networking meetings and other relevant meetings;
- an in-depth evaluation of the Near and Far Residencies with particular emphasis on the Hopper Darkroom and Priory Day Nursery Time&Tide residencies.



## Report Findings:

### **What can we learn about the constituents of a 'Community of Practice' around EY and how can Magic Acorns nurture cross-sector connectivity?**

All project strands offered ways of bringing communities together in order to develop shared knowledges and joint working practices. During Near and Far residencies MA artists worked closely with nursery settings and practitioner educators and with cultural organisations and staff within their different spaces - partnerships included:

- Take Art and China Plate - Hopper a twenty month EY theatre initiative engaging with EY practitioners, venues and theatre makers in Somerset and Surrey.
- Bridgwater Childcare Centre, Somerset - Hopper Darkroom Near and Far residency collaborators
- Bridgewater Arts Centre, Somerset - Hopper Darkroom residency collaborators
- GYCT nurseries including Priory Day Nursery and Piling - Near and Far residencies, Norfolk
- Norfolk Museums Service - Norfolk Near and Far residencies
- Snape Maltings - International cross-sector CPD
- Suffolk Libraries and Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts - Networking meetings.



#### **Near and Far Artist Residencies** (for the full report please see later section)

The structure of the Near and Far residencies provided space for the organisational partners and participants to develop a community of practice with the creativity of very young children at its centre. The activity enabled mutual engagement towards a joint enterprise, which aimed to create a shared language, and generate new artefacts and tools for supporting young children to express themselves creatively within the familiar environment of the nursery but also introduce them to new experiences outside these known spheres.

MA artists were responsive to the spaces they encountered and used improvisatory methods to spontaneously connect and collaborate with the children and the communities that surround them. The residencies created social and emotional meeting places, which operated on a deep level and generated new thinking. As a pilot the findings arrived at provide a wonderful rich ground to build on. The MA artists learned from the experience and developed a new constitution moving towards a collective vision for future working.

The experience teaches us that developing structures and clear communication routes, which encourage connection between all participants from the very start of the process in order to build trust and mutual understanding ensures that everybody within the process benefits. MA was privileged to collaborate with open and flexible organisations who went out of their way to accommodate us within their spaces during the residencies.

The residencies developed an understanding of how to further strengthen cross-sector connectivity which relies on all participants having agency. These include:

- engaging in open-ended, participatory co-creative processes;
- building in reflective time with practitioners and staff to evaluate and decide on next steps together;
- offering cross-sector CPD;
- recognising the importance of parents and devising ways to engage them meaningfully in the process;
- providing access to on-line information and resource packs;
- building relationships through regular interventions over the long-term;
- underlining positive aspects of engaging with EY and championing all young children's right to engage with art and culture
- recognising that children have their own valuable knowledges and abilities to bring to the fields of arts and arts-education;
- looking at ways cultural spaces are accessed and developing new approaches to collections and activities so that young children and their families may feel more ownership and investment;
- moving away from traditional didactic and 'educative' approaches when engaging with EY in cultural spaces.

There were some barriers during the process to be addressed in future projects and engagement. We observed that nursery practitioners, who are very focused on the children having their best interests at heart, are reluctant to acknowledge their own expertise as it is counter to the culture and about an engagement with self.

We must endeavour to create an environment where practitioner-educators can feel confident in their personal contribution within a creative process. This will require a shift in the dynamic between artist-educators who are viewed as the experts, and practitioner-educators. MA, will continue to nurture common ground, which recognises that all constituents have expertise in their different fields. Joining forces to develop the sector will involve cross-sector CPD where practitioner educator's circumstances are supported and their skills acknowledged. Progress involves integrating their perspectives from the start enabling them to potentially join initial tours around museum spaces and help devise and select themes together for example.

We need to consider and care for parents who come into projects and immersive environments; parental anxiety around their children's behaviour can be high as can concern around cultural activities. MA artists provided pathways for the children to engage with new experiences, which could be extended to parents. Ideally this includes contact with parents throughout the process.

This report and its in-depth evaluation of the residency process identified further barriers to developing relationships and creative work in nurseries:

- time to build trust between all participants - regular intervention and working over a longer time frame;
- timing of the residency for the younger children activity was too close to the start of term and the beginning their nursery experience;
- Costs including travel expenses, Backfill to pay for time out from work schedules to participate in training.

More work needs to be done to underline the positive aspects of engaging with families with young children in museums and other cultural spaces. This will require fundamental changes to the way these spaces are accessed and the approaches to the activities offered. Key challenges for developing EY work in museums include:

- fitting in around school visits;
- pressure to get a large numbers of children through their activities;
- developing an approach to EY that is not based on formal learning approaches;
- understanding and engaging with parents and their complex relationship to these spaces.



**Partnership with Snape CPD ‘Tuning People, Birds and Flowers’  
Introductory workshops to the artistic/educational constellations of Companhia de Música  
Teatral, Portugal (CMT) led by Paulo Maria Rodrigues**

The workshop took place over 2 days in the Britten Pears Building which is set within the inspirational surroundings of Snape Maltings. The cost to participants was £165 which included accommodation at Elizabeth Court, Aldeburgh. The opportunity attracted 11 participants, which was below expectation as there was space for up to 25, with 2 participants attending one day at a reduced cost. This report explores the reasons for this low uptake in the later section - *How can Magic Acorns ignite sustainable partnerships and how do we ensure long-term benefit?*.

The impacts of this experience on the individual practice of those who attended this outstanding opportunity were profound. Practitioners with different specialisms found new ways of working in their fields in relation to their EY offer. The structure of the two day in-depth residential experience involved cross-sector participants engaging practically in creative processes involving physicality and music and sound making followed by a fascinating talk about CMT’s work with communities and approach.

The work of CMT provides the starting material for the experience, which involved participants in making music in a very broad sense. Combining elements of movement, theatre and sound, a series of practical creative journeys leading to opening the eyes and ears of participants to the idea that 'Tuning' is more than a pre-condition for music-making - that it encompasses the body and mind in establishing sound relations with the world.

Non-verbal communication was the basis of practical work interspersed with periods of reflection and discussion. Paulo's experienced leadership enabled all participants to find ways to develop their own responses to the stimulus provided embracing people from all backgrounds. The process became an artistic event in itself, developing a series of exercises that built towards performative happenings.

*'The experience has been beyond 'Learning'. It has been an immersive, aesthetic, ethical experience. The resonances will be with me and my practice and in this sense it is life changing'*  
Workshop Participant

Participants included of 8 EY artist educators, 1 freelance musician and 2 members of NMS staff.

In response to our feedback questionnaire:

- 100% of participants rated the experience as excellent in response to the question 'how useful was the workshop to you?'
- 100% of participants rated the experience excellent in response to the question 'how well did the workshop leader lead the sessions?'
- 90% of participants rated the experience excellent in response to the question 'how appropriate were the spaces at Snape and Elizabeth Court?'
- 80% of participants rated the experience excellent in response to the question 'how good was the organisation and communication?'

Comments about how things could have gone better included:

- Snape was a bit cold;
- Would have liked more preliminary information re meals etc;
- didn't know what was included in the price - not clear we were staying elsewhere and not sure what to bring food wise.

MA recognises the need to offer enriching learning experiences, which contribute to the development of practice, but there is also huge validity in offering extraordinary experiences which build confidence and contribute towards the wellbeing of the participant. Some members of the group were familiar with the work of CMT and were excited about the prospect but the majority of participants did not know what to expect from the experience.

There were many comments relating to what participants learned and took from the experience and would take forward into their practice;

*'So much to take from this workshop. On a personal level I have not sung in a choir since I was 13 and had a humiliating experience with a music teacher - this is the first time in 24 years. I loved singing with the group - i expected to feel uncomfortable and awkward, but everyone helped to make it a safe space for being experimental'* Workshop Participant

*'It was fabulous to immerse myself in play. The freedom to do that is precious as I spend so much time facilitating others to play'* Workshop Participant

*'I will think about how I deliver sessions in so many different layers now. I will be trying to build in freedom for creativity'* Workshop Participant



*'The ability to play and be creative without pressure of product will enhance my ability to encourage others to do the same - to discover the potential of untapped possibilities'* Workshop Participant

The experience highlighted the importance of bringing international training opportunities to the UK, which introduce participants to different perspectives and ways of working. The workshop was of the highest calibre and welcomed all professionals working with EY. These opportunities are rare and enrich the workforce in many ways and extend the community of practice to encompass broader European perspectives. As part of our on-going remit MA intends to develop connection with national and international EY and Community Art expertise to foster the exchange of ideas and develop methods of working. In subsequent evaluative conversations with Snape and other project partners we have identified the barriers, which could have led to the relatively low uptake and propose some routes forward (see report section *How can Magic Acorns ignite sustainable partnerships and how do we ensure long-term benefit?*).



### **Acorn East Network Meetings**

The project encompassed 2 Networking meetings to offer space for those working with children of 0-5 years and their families to connect, share experience and ideas and discover new ways to grow professional practice. The meetings are free entry via registration through Eventbrite. These meetings are an on-going part of MA remit.

The intention is to develop partnerships with host organisations in the planning and delivery of the events and encourage the development of a common language across art-forms and sectors and are open to individual practitioners and organisations. Meetings host inspirational speakers and provide unique opportunities to participate in practical workshops by leading EY artists and educators.

Meetings within the project remit included:

1. Partnership with Suffolk Libraries - Ipswich Library on Friday 28th September, which attracted 15 participants including MA and FB representatives.
2. Partnership with Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art (SCVA) Friday 16th November in SCVA Studio space which attracted 30 participants including MA and FB representatives.

The Ipswich Library event involved Guest speaker Lil Newton Headteacher of Highfield Nursery, a recognised research and progressive teaching nursery to deliver a talk on Creativity in the Nursery:

*'Both the Emotional and Physical Environment support the development of children as creative beings and our Story Curriculum provides a springboard for richly experienced personalized and collaborative moments'. Lil Newton*

We included an 'Ask the Artist' session offered by Rosie Adediran and Aly Tipping of Wonderful Beast, a theatre company dramatising stories which ignite our sense of wonder while devising opportunities for all ages who have built a relationship with Suffolk Libraries.

Participants included individuals and representatives from nursery settings, theatre companies and arts and cultural organisations including Dance East and Red House

The meeting was greatly appreciated and constructive feedback from this session included:

- offering a range of activities including more practical work;
- preparing a clear agenda with timings;
- giving clear directions to the location;
- more focus and clarity from the speakers;
- an idea for speed-dating, networking that enables working partnerships.

The SCVA event saw the numbers of participants double; this could have been due to the venue and location but also demonstrates the growing visibility of these events. Participants included individual artist and representatives from a broad range of regional companies, nursery and educational settings, arts organisations, museums and libraries including Norwich Theatre Royal, Norfolk and Norwich Festival, Norfolk Libraries, Norfolk Museums Service and Red House.

The event included Rach Anstey Sanders, Artist Educator with the Sainsbury Centre, leader of 'Mini Studio' sessions, speaking about EY work at SCVA, and a talk and participatory workshop led by Roma Patel, scenographer and digital artist, designing interactive and site-specific performance, theatre and digital installations in the UK and Europe, Roma was also a collaborating artist on the Near and Far project.

Feedback from participants regarding their interest in being part of an EY Network included:

- young children being subversive in galleries;
- developing immersive experiences - how can we achieve that as a Festival, looking at different ways to grow our programme;
- changing the way Libraries do EY;
- getting different arts and cultural experiences into areas of deprivation;
- getting to know what other people do and what their perspective is;
- getting to know how we might use technologies in their world;
- helping to reassess everything I do within creative intergenerational work;
- broadening relationships - meeting practitioners who might be able to collaborate;
- developing cross-over with other communities - working with people with dementia;
- developing process driven play based work;
- developing non-verbal communication and sensory experiences - how do children connect?
- working in environments with other creative people I work on my own in a little bubble
- Interested in developing work with families - we are introducing an immersive and interactive programme at Theatre Royal;
- Interested in meeting artists - could there be list of EY artists, developers and organisations made available?
- Could the Network meet at Stage Two Norwich Theatre Royal?

Further meetings to develop connection between arts and cultural organisations included Festival Bridge in partnership with MA holding a meeting hosted by Kettles Yard in Cambridge in October 2018, in response to the increase in provision of activity aimed at children aged 0-5 and their families. The aim was to bring NPOs and other arts and cultural organisations together to examine the geographic spread of work, describe their current offer, share future plans and aspirations, look at possibilities for shared practice, collaboration, and to examine issues and barriers.

Organisations present included: Kettles Yard - Suffolk Music Hub - The Garage - CIMS - Britten Sinfonia - Norfolk Music Hub - Cambridgeshire Music - The Red House - SHARE Museums East - Dance East - Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds - Norfolk Libraries.

Priority areas for development were identified as follows:

- Work force development emerged as the over-arching priority for all, appreciating and understanding the science that underpins the work: for existing artists to help them adjust their practice for this age group, for young emerging artist and for nursery practitioners and trainees;
- Families;
- Quality of provision;
- Equality of access;
- How to communicate – use of language.
- 

Discussion included the role for LCEPs in terms of raising awareness of EY needs in localities, and the role of Festival Bridge in connecting creative organisations. The group agreed that sharing experiences and evidence of what works and matching the different partners' offers would be useful, including invitations to participate in each others' work. There should also be a role for freelancers in this. It was agreed that any such offers could be circulated via Festival FB or MA if not done directly.

The SHARE Museums East symposium - First Encounters of the Museum Kind: very young visitors making museums better. The event included Keynotes speakers including Elaine Bates - Manchester Museum, Penny Thompson - Arts Council England and Professor Jayne Osgood - Middlesex University. There were presentations offered by NMS, Lil Newton - Highfield Nursery School and FB. Delegates were invited to participate in breakout sessions led by early years educational officers from regional organisations and a PHD study into ways children could engage with museum exhibits. MA were invited to be part of the Market Place activity.



## **How can Magic Acorns ignite sustainable partnerships and how do we ensure long-term benefit?**

Magic Acorns has been in conversation with project partners including Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) and Snape Maltings about developing more in-depth work with wider engagement inspired by the work piloted during the Near and Far residencies and CPD.

Conversations with Colin Stott and Phoebe Wingate (NMS) included discussion about how can we adapt and build on the successful experience of the last project. Priority areas identified for development included:

- offering more accessible CPD;
- input into Norwich Castle's Keep redevelopment project including a new EY gallery;
- input into the Time&Tide scoping the development of museum displays;
- developing new relationships and expanding EY programming with other NMS museums including Lowestoft;
- presenting work at SHARE Museums East conferences;
- developing regular offers delivered by museums staff;
- developing the Near&Far model via a series of workshops/interventions, which could lead to a performance/sharing;
- developing an event offering that schools could hook into on a regular basis.

An extended proposal should respond to the findings of the Near&Far project with regard to exploration of space and collections led by the innate knowledges that children can bring to the process, which would inform curation, design and engagement.

There is also a growth opportunity working closely with nursery settings in order to provide new perspectives on engagement with EY and their families in museums. It was suggested that a future project could focus on nursery and reception age children with links to the EY Foundation Stage Curriculum learning goals and Characteristics of Effective Learning.

It was observed that nurseries fell away from the Making Waves Together Project started by the LCEPS and that future work could involve igniting interest in this forum for those with specific interest in working with under 5s.





The CPD led by Paulo Rodrigues of CMT, Portugal offered as part of the Magic Acorns First Steps project was attended by two members of the NMS team and was great appreciated offering them inspiration and new ways to develop their practice. It would be of benefit to explore reasons why this offer did not attract more interest from cultural organisations as CPD for their staff to inform future offerings. These included:

- Location - distance travel to Snape Matings may have put people off;
- Timing - museums staff may not wish to give up their weekends to training;
- Cost - organisations may not recognise the benefit and subsidise their staff to attend.

Evaluation conversations with Phillipa Reive and Amy Mallett at Snape Matings regarding the 'Tuning people Birds and Flowers' CPD workshop led by Paulo Rodrigues highlighted the following factors which may have led to low uptake and could inform future collaboration:

Cost:

- people could not afford it - the workshop and accommodation cost was high for a freelance musicians;
- CPD is paid for by employers - practitioner educators do not expect to pay for training themselves;
- Snape training offers are often free with travel and accommodation paid for take up is always lower when a fee is charged.

Timing:

- For practitioner educators in EY settings the activity taking place over a weekend was a barrier.

Marketing and publicity:

- problems with the publicity defining the offer to a cross-sector audience with different expectations - developing clear messaging. The flyer was beautiful but perhaps did not fully explain what the experience would be to those who would be new to this type of work and process;
- In future market offers like this nationally through other arts organisations who have EY as part of their internal offer;
- social media publicity was much more orientated to arts-based practitioners. Most people who attended had been linked into the wider project;
- misunderstanding that the term cross-sector means cross-arts;
- more clarity that it was also for EY providers looking for CPD option for their staff.

Phillipa Reive acknowledged that the information did not appear on their website quick enough and added that the traffic through our website is very small. Snape had done 2 or 3 different mail-outs using the flyer to all contacts already working in EY or would like to be and it was also sent it out to 30 musicians and 10 cross-discipline artists and a smaller group of teachers who sit within broader networks.

Suggestions to develop participation in the future through marketing included:

- widening contacts nationally;
- launching a newsletter to access a wider potential market;
- using social media as a tool to target specific groups;
- provide video and visual examples of what participants might expect;
- document the Paulo Rodrigues workshop with film that tell the story that this was a life changing experience;
- gather testimonial from those who attended this workshop written and video.

It was recognised that the documentation from this opportunity provides a foundation to build on and that publicising future events early enough would guarantee getting the workshop and talk into the Brochure, which has a circulation of 35,000. The Brochure publicises what's on in a much broader sense and goes out to a community that this activity fits really well. It would require a longer project leading time - 1 year in advance as the brochure covers Sept '19 - May '20.

Shape Matings indicated that they would be interested in working together again on a repeat training offer, which we can get in to the brochure and build on what we have learned from this experience. It would mean addressing the barriers highlighted in order to develop participation with the recognition that we are trying to bring communities together who have different approaches and expectations

Priority areas identified for adapting and building on the artistically successful experience of the last project include:

- growing Snape's residency programme - offer of a free week long residency 5 days in a space, with accommodation and catering and something towards travel;
- building in an application process which provides more information about what will be learned and experienced and asks questions of the attendees;
- providing different fee options or bursaries for freelance artists;
- approaching arts and cultural organisations with a CPD offer for staff;
- developing some opportunities during the week, making them accessible to practitioners who do not want to give up weekends.

A future collaborative project could involve:

- performances by CMT and others;
- Conference, symposium & network meetings - people gathering for a day to share, discuss needs and ideas;
- Network development which includes health, happiness & wellbeing focused projects exploring co-creativity in different settings;
- exploring music's role in contributing to the health of communities and also developing the health and wellbeing of musicians - exploring music making in it's broadest sense.

### **Next Steps:**



Magic Acorns First Steps is focused on building a community of practice and developing connection between the constituents that support EY through a combination for practical arts activity with children in settings and museums, workforce development and networking. This work provides valuable knowledges and the foundation for future working which includes:

- developing the residency model - child-led and process-led, responsive and collaborative artistic practice;
- extending and developing the EY offer in partnership with the places and spaces where young children and their families go including: Museums, Libraries and Galleries,
- including other community spaces - disused shops, malls, parks and other public spaces;
- supporting emerging and established practitioners through CPD, training, mentorship, internship and bursary schemes;
- developing connection amongst those working within EY through networking, symposium, conferences and other events;
- developing an EY Arts Festival in the East;
- developing international connection offering inspirational, world-class performances and training;
- addressing barriers and developing access to arts and culture for young children, parents and carers;
- developing regular interventions over a longer timeframe within settings and arts and cultural organisations;
- developing marketing and communications to enhance profile and develop a national presence

The project highlighted gaps in MA's capacity particularly with regard to marketing and communications. MA is a fledgling organisation under the wing of GYCT and supported by FB. To take the next steps we must attract funding and investment in order to meet the needs of the sector and grow a sustainable business model.

MA does not currently have any regular capacity - Directors have developed the Business Plan, managed projects and events interspersed with other freelance activity. In order to steer the organisation forward there is requirement for MA to employ a Manager, initially on a part-time basis, but leading to full-time, who will provide the hub and co-ordinate activities.

A Manager role could encompass:

- co-ordination of funding bids, working with bid writers;
- project management and contact;
- responsibility for Marketing & Comms working with specialist developers and project partners;
- growing the Network and developing other events;
- general admin and finance.

The Impacts of Magic Acorns First Steps project were profound and far-reaching. The project built on recommendations made by the Festival Bridge commissioned EY Arts Activity Mapping project.

*'Early experiences lay the foundation for all learning and possible engagement with arts and culture, which for young children, is likely to be spontaneous, instinctive and natural. By providing experiences that allow and nurture a young child's desire to explore and be curious, artist-educators can enrich and deepen children's artistic capacities, as well as those of their families and carers.'* Dr Jessica Pitt - EY Arts Activity Mapping Project 2017

The project responded to the perceived fragmentation of the sector and the need for cohesive work and artistic development as outlined in this report. It is an exciting time for the development of EY arts-practice and the sector, as EY gains the recognition it deserves within the cultural landscape. Magic Acorns is well placed to continue to support this development through its inspirational activities, and to represent the richness and diversity of the Eastern Region's offer nationally and internationally.

## **Near & Far Residencies - Creative Process and Activity Report**

Bridgwater and Taunton Collage Childcare Centre, Somerset

Priory Daycare Centre and Time & Tide Museum

Pilling Park Nursery and Norwich Castle



Over three week-long residencies working within nursery settings and cultural organisations in Somerset and Norfolk groups of artists practically tested ideas relating to the various practical uses of materials and things and investigated new approaches to working with very young children and the communities that surround them. The Near & Far Project was about exploring the intimate connections between small children, parents, and educators when attention is closely focused on each other and also to discover what happens when we journey outwards and share experiences together.

The project aimed to develop cross-arts and multi-modal practice bringing together dance, puppetry, music, visual arts, scenographic and digital artists within a collaborative process. The project investigated the unique qualities and creative opportunities offered by participatory and immersive work, which included interactive digital technologies.

### **Key research questions:**

- What do we discover/learn when we put children at the centre of an open exploratory artistic process?
- What is the role of materials and scenographic technologies in developing early years (EY) arts practice?
- What do we learn from the Near & Far residency model about process and relationship building?

### **Near & Far - A Summary of Key Findings:**

#### **Hopper Darkroom - Bridgwater Childcare Centre Residency**

- What do we discover/learn when we put children at the centre of an open exploratory artistic process?

*The importance of time* - to get to know the community over the few days; to build trust and collaborate. Allowing time develops deeper relationships and produces more meaningful interactions.



*The importance of the transitions* - into and between activities contain the keys for everybody to access new experiences on their own terms - giving space and agency to children and for adults to not be prescriptive.

*Not talking!* - children's space and agency was supported by not talking during activities allowing it to move at the pace the child determines. Does not mean an imposed silence - a range of sounds were used to encourage and give credence to the children's vocalisations - including repetition of children's words, laughing, tonal responses and singing. During transitions from inside spaces to outside - singing indicated things were changing, that we were starting, finishing or moving from one place to another.

- What is the role of materials and scenographic technologies in developing EY arts practice?

*Limiting the range of materials used* - children made complex connections between physical explorations of the material elements and visual and sound responses triggered by the interactive technologies. By limiting the range of materials we developed a consistent aesthetic that gave children space to contribute and make their own connections.

*Extending the possibilities with interactive tech* - developed communication and self-expression as well as an excitement for learning and discovering new things via a range of light and sound responsive technologies embedded into materials. Development of T Cam, a robust toddler-friendly device, built around a small video surveillance camera - what the camera sees is projected onto surfaces offering alternative perspectives, connection and interaction between physical and digital worlds.

*Providing information and resources* - including simple inexpensive ways for practitioner-educators to integrate digital tech into their interactions with children.

- What do we learn from the Near & Far residency model about process and relationship building?

*Making connections* - developing connection between all participants from the very start. Developing understanding of the prerequisites of working with our youngest children within arts and cultural organisations, who are often focused on school age participants. More work needs to be done to underline the positive aspects of engaging with this audience, which will require fundamental changes to the way spaces are accessed and approaches to activities offered.

*Supporting and informing the community* - includes developing and supporting parents and practitioner-educators via:

- practitioner involvement in the planning stages to engage fully with the process;
- reflective time to discuss the residency and its impacts with all practitioner educators present;
- CPD focusing on the methods and materials;
- emphasis given to the importance of the parental involvement in the residency set up;
- addressing the barriers and creating points of engagement with parents.



### **Priory Day Nursery and Time & Tide Residency**

- What do we discover/learn when we put children at the centre of an open exploratory artistic process?

*Young children are exploratory by nature* - young children have direct and uncluttered relationships and communication with materials, which are not confined by the need to achieve immediate results.

*Young children have unique knowledges and understandings of the world* - proposals in the setting gave space for children to create their own miniature curations and make their own artefacts to present at the museum. This process familiarised them with abstract concepts in a whole-body way, so that when they came to experience the unfamiliar environment of the museum they had gained confidence and devised ways of engaging with it.

*Permission to play* - children could opt out of any activity if they wished; no expectation or agenda as to what constitutes engagement. This can be hard to do within an educational framework as it means relinquishing control of the space.

*We need to support young children's exploration/learning and not direct it* - by offering alternative approaches where experiences are linked and about the space and the people and not about 'educating' or being didactic - creating an interesting, surprising and different experience for all involved.

- What is the role of materials and scenographic technologies in developing EY arts practice?

*Developing knowledge and communication through physical transformation of simple materials* - children enjoyed the transformation of simple materials, connecting with them in new ways, which also developed a physical conversation with the space and a vehicle for self expression.

*Developing connection using transformational and transitional objects* - exploring and developing physicality through conversations with objects in the nursery environment. Children collected objects in small wooden boxes, which they took to the museum. These containers mirrored the museum style of curation, giving children agency within an unfamiliar environment.

- What do we learn from the Near & Far residency model about process and relationship building?

*Developing cross-sector relationships in the long term* - concern that the residential experience was parachuting in, creating something wonderful and then leaving. Feedback from practitioner-educators endorsed this input as a valuable way to introduce new concepts and shift from the daily routine, but that in the long-term additional regular input over a longer time-frame would be very beneficial.

*Barriers identified to developing relationships and creative work in nurseries:*

- Lack of time to build trust between all participants - working over a longer time-frame would enable participants to get to know one another and discover new ways of doing things, which might be different from the experiences they are used to;
- Timing of the residency - for the younger children this activity was too close to the start of term and the beginning their nursery experience;
- Practitioner educators feeling under-confident or outside the process;
- Common ground where everybody's expertise is valued;
- Cost - time out from busy work schedule to participate in CPD, planning and reflection;
- Involving parents and getting them on board.

*Promoting an exchange of knowledges and developing an understanding of how to further strengthen connectivity:*

- offering open-ended, participatory co-creative processes;
- building in reflective time with practitioners and staff to evaluate and decide on next steps together;
- offering cross-sector CPD;
- recognising the importance of parents and devising ways to engage them meaningfully in the process;
- providing access to on-line information and resource packs;
- building relationships by developing regular interventions over the long-term;
- underlining positive aspects of engaging with EY and championing all young children's right to engage with art and culture;

- looking at ways cultural spaces are accessed and developing new approaches to collections and activities in order that young children and their families feel ownership and can participate;
- moving away from traditional didactic and 'educative' approaches when engaging with EY in cultural spaces.





## **Near & Far Hopper Residency Bridgwater Arts Centre and Bridgwater Childcare Centre full report:**

### **Planning**

The Hopper Darkroom Project Residential took place from the 19th - 23rd June 2018 and involved four Magic Acorns (MA) artists working in partnership with Bridgwater Arts Centre (BAC) and Bridgwater and Taunton College Childcare Centre.

Hopper was a twenty-month early years theatre initiative run by Take Art engaging with EY practitioners, venues and theatre makers, which aimed to build confidence, understanding and access to quality under-fives performance.

This pilot initiative was based in Somerset and Surrey, focusing on specific areas with low levels of arts participation and identified disadvantaged families with small children. Magic Acorns was invited to participate in a Darkroom residency after a procurement process. We saw working with an established national organisation as beneficial to our learning and understanding of the residency model.

Hopper Darkroom artists included Charlotte Arculus, Joy Haynes, Roma Patel and Jaz Crampton. This was the first time this group had worked together. The intention was to explore the new collaboration and test performative interactions over 4 days using single materials, sound and light responsive technologies. We planned to develop these materials at BAC for work with children, practitioners-educators at the setting with the process culminating in a Near & Far installation at the Arts Centre.

Planning included conversations with programme leaders at TakeArt and with the EY Teaching Centre Co-ordinator: Amanda about daily routines at the nursery and how we might be able to easily cooperate. We planned to create exploratory environments and test interactive technologies with a group of eight two-year-old children and children with special needs, and practitioner-educators over two 2-hour sessions in the setting and with parents and careers at the Near & Far Installation at BAC.

Due to circumstances the residency took place predominantly at the setting as the upstairs space provided by BAC was small and impractical and was not considered an easy space for small children to visit. We had confusing and unhelpful communication with BAC staff when we arrived about what alternative spaces might be available for use during the residency. It transpired that we would be unable to bring the children and parents to BAC for a sharing as planned, as access to the larger theatre space was very limited. The artist team decided very quickly with agreement from all parties to shift all activity to Bridgwater Childcare Centre.

This last-minute change of plan was the result of a lack of communication with BAC in the run up to the residency. The rationale offered by Take Art was that BAC personnel were very stretched due to cut backs and staff shortages. From our perspective there appeared to be little consideration by BAC staff given to what this artist residency might involve and require by way of support, and a lack of thinking about how the young children might practically engage with their space.

MA artists had been reliant on contact through and with the Hopper team as we were travelling some distance to participate in the Darkroom with little time to negotiate once there, and were unfamiliar with the space. From subsequent evaluative conversations between TakeArt and MA it was accepted that there were problems with communications which adversely affected the relationship with BAC. We learned that navigating and building new relationships requires that special attention should be paid to the delicate process of connecting participants beforehand and managing expectation. This connection and trust building is absolutely necessary in order to ignite sustainable partnerships. This process is slow as the work and artistic approach is pioneering and sometimes unfamiliar to educational and organisational partners. MA is planting seeds towards an entirely new way of working.



## The process:

Bridgwater Childcare Centre were extremely co-operative offering us rooms to store and develop materials and access to amazing outdoor play spaces. The practitioner-educators were highly engaged with our process, observing and documenting the work throughout. The ethos and pedagogy at this Children's Centre is progressive and child-centred and world facing, which was evident in the children who were open and enthusiastic throughout our time there.

*'We noticed lots of turn-taking between the children - negotiating turns and offering space to each other and very little conflict' EY Teaching Centre Co-ordinator Amanda*

In practice we maintained the schedule of 2 development sessions culminating in a sharing of materials exploring inside and outdoor spaces & structures, which included the forest school room and garden, the gazebo and garden shed. These spaces underwent transformations led by an investigation of the qualities and use of one single material augmented by interactive technologies. Although we had specified working with the youngest children we needed to be flexible and respond to nursery routines as during sometimes during sessions the youngest children were sleeping so we worked with alternate groups of children aged 3 - 4yrs and 2 - 3 yrs and babies.

MA artists spent the first day developing an understanding of the nursery, observing routines, use of objects and space. We observed the older children playing with home-made play dough, which inspired the creation of 'singing play dough' a conductive play dough, which responds to touch and pressure by emitting sounds via monophonic soundboards. Our process involved responding directly to the environment taking what was already happening and extending it to become surprising in order that the children could re-discover and interact with it in new ways.

The children spent a lot of time outside and there were distinct characteristics to the children's play inside and outside. Bridgwater Childcare Centre has an outside forest school space that they take groups of children to every afternoon. Outside the children's activity was entirely self-directed, they moved around different areas in the expansive garden exploring sand, water, open and enclosed spaces in their own time, sometimes playing together and at other times alone. We were interested in developing these areas, particularly the forest school and the shed.

Outside areas are also subject to natural interventions or changes due to weather or wildlife, which alters relationships with it. There were some wild bees in the garden, which practitioner educators were careful to tell the children to be careful and respectful of. We wanted to reflect these natural interventions in our response to the environment, which led to incorporating video animation of bees with human faces into the Blue Shed installation on the last day.



### **Could we try not to talk?**

Through the process we asked the practitioner-educators to try not to talk during the sessions. This approach was appreciated alongside the recognition that there is so much pressure on educators to focus on developing spoken language skills above all else. Early interventions could be facilitated by the non-verbal approach, which gives value to other forms of communication. Thereby enabling children to gain confidence in their ability to confidently express themselves via varied and complex ranges of physical and sensory communication methods.

*'Communication comes in so many different ways - they are experiencing with all their senses'*  
*Amanda EY Teaching Centre Co-ordinator*



### **Testing the concepts**

**Sessions 1, 20th June Bridgwater Childcare Centre with a group of children 3 - 4yrs and practitioner educators.**

2 exploratory installation environments:

1. Singing Play dough Island - we had intended to use the sensory room to explore the 'Singing Play dough' instead as the midsummer weather was so good, it was decided to set this up outside in the gazebo - an outside space that was contained by being wrapped in elastic strands. Easy to enter and exit through the strands but provided focus on the activity.
2. Paper Room - Inside in the Forest Room we transformed the space using:
  - large sheets of paper covering walls & floor and suspended sheets from lines;
  - an OHP with a glass dish of white paint which could be manipulated with a stick to change the light patterns projected onto the paper. The OHP was situated on a moveable trolley, but restricted by cabling;
  - sensor pads under the paper floor emitting piano note sounds when pressed.
  - A power fan;
  - a variety of sticks and stones

Transition - the group of children were introduced to us in the hall by the practitioner-educators sang naming rhymes to introduce children and artist educators. Children were quite shy and found the focus on them difficult at this point, but the exercise provided transition from a known routine to the new situation.

### Observations

The children were led outside to the gazebo and were re-introduced to a known single material with its surprising new quality. The conductive play dough emitted musical notes and quirky sounds when handled. The group energetically explored its malleability in various ways using gross and fine motor skills; pressing, rolling and wrapping objects - developing a physical conversation with it. They came to recognise the connections between the sounds and the electrical devices and playfully explored this relationship. They interpreted the sounds themselves making their own vocalisations connecting with artists educators who did not speak but echoed back their sounds and words. There was great enjoyment as the children interacted with their environment and each other through the material. This was notable from the length of time the children stayed within the small space and the quality of engagement. The practitioner educators engaged with the activity also sitting outside the gazebo enclosure looking in - taking notes and video, while interacting with the children.

The Paper Room provided a contrasting space. The children's physical activity generated organic sounds from the paper - rustling, tearing, scrunching etc. Artist educators and children explored the hidden pressure points positioned under the paper, which emitted individual musical notes extending the experience and creating a soundscape of both deliberate and accidental movement. They also explored cause and effect of moving white paint around in a glass dish with sticks and leaves on an overhead projector, which changed the light patterns projected onto the paper. Sticks of different sizes were used as tools to strike and tear the paper and to make different more staccato sounds. The energy was anarchic and multi-focused as the children moved excitedly around the space. The fan changed the dynamic and interaction with the paper capturing attention creating a single point of focus. The fan-event acted as a way of transitioning from a multiple-focus immersive environment to an eventful happening (the fan) and then onto the next thing – going outside or back to nursery.

### **Session 2, 21st June Bridgwater Childcare Centre with 2 groups of children - 3-4 yrs and a younger group of 2-3 yrs and practitioner educators.**

2 exploratory installation environments:

1. Paper Room with some adjustments to incorporate learning from the day before: We needed to make the pressure points on the floor more visible so created luminous green dots, so they were more easily discoverable. We also varied the sounds incorporating drums, cymbals, whistles and surprising humorous noises.
3. Elastic Garden - transforming the forest school outside area with:
  - white elastic strands and draped chiffon wrapped around trees to create a maze-like space with crossing and interconnecting pathways.
  - the 'Singing Pot' - a large cooking pot with a sound device attached to its base making it resonate and change the sound experience when put over the head like a helmet.

Transition - artist-educators devised an introduction into the Paper Room with play outside the space, making paper costumes for everybody to wear and creating a paper pathway leading to the space. This was a response to the day before when the children had seemed uncomfortable being introduced to strangers. We invited the children to also wear paper ponchos which (some were interested in and others not). This interaction was performed wordlessly with song. Whether it was because we were working with different children or because the transition worked better this session seemed more settled with a deeper sense of curiosity.

### Observations

The highlighted pressure points on the floor instigated games between the children and artists educators - interactions with hands and feet which were sustained. Some of the younger children were quite tentative sitting on practitioner-educators' laps witnessing activity and others were happy to sit in the mountains of paper and watch.

Children played with the hanging paper pulling it down. The atmosphere was more settled than the session before with older children using the sticks in a less energetic way as tools. The quality of the interactions with the younger children was very different. An artist-educator playfully vocalised responses to sounds and to the children's vocalisations and laughter. They enjoyed the sensation of the wind from the fan and the effect it had blowing the paper about.

Children and adults climbed through the elastic strands - changing body shapes, rolling, crouching, jumping and pulling at the elastic, physically exploring the quality of the material. An artist-educator introduced the Sound Pot to a child - this was quite intimidating having your vision obscured, but they enjoyed looking into it. and making their own use of it.

The children discovered apples on the tree: "That apple green" and "I found the apple". A child picked the apples and was soon joined by others - this led to the apples being put into the Singing Pot. They naturally started counting 1,2 3, 4, 5,6 between them - a perfect learning game of their own devising! Demonstrating a shared sequencing as game, material encounter and rhythm. This game was repeated in the second session with the addition of grass to the mix. These sessions were relaxed and quiet - under the trees on a hot summer day with the younger children becoming more comfortable with the artist-educators particularly the man in this environment.

*'One child had been very hesitant to go into the forest school area previously - during the sessions she was happy to explore this space in a new light, she gave herself permission to enjoy it and came back both times.'* Amanda EY Children's Centre Co-ordinator.

**The Sharing 22nd June Bridgwater Childcare Centre with a mixed age group of children, practitioner educators, parents and members of the TakeArt Team.  
A journey through 3 exploratory installation environments:**





Paper Room - For this exploration we removed the OHP and introduced:

- 'T Cam' a robust toddler-friendly device built around a small video surveillance camera mounted on a dolly. An app sends a signal straight to an iPad and to a video projector so what T Cam saw was also translated into large scale onto surfaces around the room. As an object T Cam was full of character - the video box become like a robot head with eyes attached to a flexible neck. The intention was that this apparatus be pushed around the space and that children show T Cam objects of interest to them. What the camera sees is also projected onto the walls and ceiling offering an alternative perspective and providing connection and interaction between what is physical and touchable and an ethereal screen world. This was T Cam's inaugural pilot and will eventually become part of Charlotte Arculus' doctoral project.
- a microscope - artist-educators played with placing a leaf under the lens and projecting the enlarged image onto the floor. Using this tech we were presented with the challenge of making it toddler proof - ensuring that cabling and power points were safe. As the apparatus is fragile it ended up being concealed and viewable through a glass porthole.

Elastic Forest - moving outside to explore a natural environment interacting with the materiality of elastic. Playing with the Singing Pot which you put on your head to hear the music.

Blue Shed - We added an additional surprise experience transforming a familiar structure in the garden and to develop the sense of looking from the outside into an enclosed space this was achieved by:

- creating an installation in the interior of the shed which included an animation of bees with human faces projected onto gauze viewable by looking in through holes in the shed door and wall.
- constructing a climbing frame on the outside of the shed leading to one of the viewing holes using plastic tubing found in the garden. The tubing was painted with conductive paint, which when touched made sounds - dogs barking, monkey noises and children laughing.

The journey from the Paper Room through the Elastic Forest to the Blue Shed was enjoyable and playful with different experiences in each encouraging children and adults to interact with the familiar spaces in new ways and through materials on equal terms. A comment from one of the participants was that the experience *'made very ordinary things special'*.

We were joined by a couple of parents - we had hoped to involve more parents at this stage, but the change of plan shifting the activity from BAC may have confused the message.

### **What can take forward from the Bridgwater Childcare Centre Residency experience referencing key research questions:**

- **What do we discover/learn when we put children at the centre of an open exploratory artistic process?**

*The importance of time* - this process explored intimate connections and also what happens when we introduce new external unknown elements. It was wonderful to watch the children take initiative and gain confidence as the residency progressed over the 4 days. As an artist-educator It was a real strength and a privilege to get to know the community at Bridgwater Childcare Centre over the few days, build trust and really collaborate. We deduced that allowing time to develop deeper relationships produces more meaningful interactions.

*The importance of the transitions* - including how the children were introduced to new faces, spaces and activities. Transitions contain the keys for everybody to access new experiences on their own terms. We need to give space and agency to the children and for adults to not be too prescriptive as this can be intimidating.

*Not talking!* - the children's space and agency was supported by not talking during the activities. It was observed that this enabled an altered sense of time 'a flow state' when children and adults played together, acting in the moment, responding honestly and directly to and with one another allowing the activity to move at the pace of what is emerging. Allowing time for situations to evolve slowly and for adults to refrain from verbal direction enabled the children to take the lead in an approach to new materials and situations, engaging on their own terms. It ensured responses were authentic, not directed or prescribed by dominant voices.

*'We noticed as practitioners and educators the amount of time they were looking, listening and touching - all the other senses were coming into effect. Brilliant! There was no conflict. They were absorbed in what they were doing. They didn't need guidance and were able to experiment with things themselves.'* Amanda EY teaching Centre Co-ordinator

This did not mean an imposed silence, the artist-educators used a range of sounds to encourage and give credence to the children's vocalisations - this included repetition of the children's words, laughing, tonal responses and singing. During the sessions we started to sing during the transitions from inside spaces to outside - without spoken instruction the singing indicated that things were changing, that we were starting, finishing or moving from one place to another.

• **What is the role of materials and scenographic technologies in developing EY arts practice?**

*Limiting the range of materials used* - The children made complex connections between their physical exploration of the material elements and visual and sound responses triggered by the interactive technologies. By limiting the range of materials we developed a consistent aesthetic; white paper and elastic transformed by coloured projected light and natural found objects; blue play dough and a blue shed transformed through sound and light interventions. The children contributed to the experimental game making their own connections; picking green apples and putting them into the Singing Pot cleverly reminding us this is actually a container for food as well; T Cam became a vehicle to ride and be pushed about on.

*Extending the possibilities with interactive tech* - this process investigated the unique qualities and creative opportunities interactive digital technologies offer to developing communication and self expression as well as an excitement for learning and discovering new things. We integrated use of these technologies alongside exploration of simple materials that are readily accessible. We wanted to demystify and offer simple inexpensive ways for practitioner-educators to integrate digital tech into their interactions with children.

*'There are things we can take from this and do on a small scale. Build it into our daily routine.'* Amanda EY teaching Centre Co-ordinator

*Providing resources* to support this would be a useful future step as this way of working is very new to some practitioners. It was expressed that It would be good to have a list of things they could do for themselves; for example, the conductive play dough - could they have the recipe and where could they access materials?

*'The technologies are actually very cheap - we could make a little kit of basic materials and tools with instructions and ideas for use'.* Artist Educator Roma

• **What do we learn from the Near & Far residency model about process and relationship building?**

*Making connections* - this residency underlined the importance of developing connection between all participants from the very start. Difficult communication in the planning stages resulted in us not being able to work with BAC. The practitioner-educators at the children's centre were welcoming and open - giving over their space, adjusting routines to embrace the new activity, which required trust and a willingness to be flexible. This stems from a real understanding of the prerequisites of working with our youngest children. Sadly, this is not widely understood within cultural organisations, who are focused on school age participants. More work needs to be done to underline the positive aspects of engaging with this audience, which will require fundamental changes to the way the cultural spaces are accessed and approaches to the activities offered.

*Supporting and informing the community* - this project has been about developing "a community of practice" with the creativity of very young children at its centre, but also developing and supporting parents and practitioner-educators who surround them. The practitioner-educators at Bridgwater Childcare Centre were very progressive in their pedagogy and child-led approach, but it was expressed that more practitioner involvement in the planning stages in order that they more fully understand the process would have been beneficial. We had a lot of feedback from Amanda at the Childcare Centre but it would be advantageous to build in more reflective time to discuss the residency and its impacts with all practitioner educators present. It was discussed that offering CPD focusing on the methods and materials would have been helpful.

Involving parents - unfortunately we were not able to involve parents to any great degree due to the changes of plan, but also because there was not enough emphasis given to the importance of their involvement when the residency was discussed and set up. Parents and practitioner-educators are the expert connectors who spend most time with the children and know them best - more parental involvement in the residency would have completed the circle in that children would have been able to share their experiences with their loved ones. This residency has underlined the importance of addressing the barriers and creating points of engagement with parents in the future.



**Near and Far The Norfolk Residencies - full report with focus on residency 1: -  
Residency 1 Priory Day Nursery and Time and Tide Museum, Yarmouth 1st - 5th October  
2018  
Residency 2 Pilling Park Nursery and Norwich Castle, Norwich - 8th - 12th October 2018**



### **Planning:**

MA artists involved in the Hopper Darkroom residency used the experience as a foundation to scope ideas for the Norfolk residencies. The positive experience working with Bridgwater Childcare Centre gave confidence in the inherent strength of the residency model; of responding directly to a space and interacting with children and practitioner educators.

The arts-based approach involved using materials and interactive technologies to stimulate conversations and rediscover environments. The child/material- centred approach involved going in with some materials and being led by the children. We planned a timetable and structure for activity, but enabled improvisation and collaboration in the moment with the children and what was emerging. Additionally, as a R&D process, Near & Far artists were also involved in testing materials and technologies for ongoing use.

For the Norfolk residencies MA artists held planning discussions with museum and setting partners to ensure relationships were developed before the residency weeks started in order to arrive at a common understanding about the residency and its mutual outcomes and benefits. The Near & Far concept explores the creative and developmental opportunities that arise when trust is built within communities when children, parents and practitioner educators explore familiar and new places together.

The Norfolk residencies were structured around working with up to 10 children from each nursery setting alongside their practitioner-educators with an emphasis on involving parents in the visits to the museums. In practice all the children present at the setting were involved in the sessions, with a group of 10 of the older children with parents and practitioner-educators from Priory Day Nursery going to the Time and Tide Museum. We had to make some changes to the timetable with Pilling Park Nursery as the setting is very new with only 8 children in total on roll. This meant that time was limited in this setting to one session and that all children with parents and practitioner educators attended the Norwich Castle visit.



The MA artist team expanded to involve dancer and movement specialist Abby Page and visual artist Sophie Fox. We had intended to work with Paul Weston of Laboratory Media Education, a sound artist with extensive EY experience, but he was not available during the residency periods. Instead Jaz Crampton, technician and sound artist, worked with interactive scenographer Roma Patel to develop sound and visual technologies.

### **Priory Day Nursery (PDN) and Time&Tide (T&T) Museum Planning**

All artist educators met with members of Norfolk Museum Service (NMS), Colin Stott (Learning Manager - Eastern Area Museums) and Polly Ward (T&T Education Team) prior to the residency to discuss the proposed schedule and how we might use space at the T&T. We needed to work around activity already happening at the museum, which would be open to the public all week. As a result, we were offered an additional making room by SeaChange Arts at the nearby Drill House.

We considered suitable installation spaces and decided that the event on the last day would involve an exploratory journey discovering the Smoke Houses, one of the upstairs galleries as 'a cabinet of curiosity', The Yarmouth Street and Courtyard.

We thought about curating objects between nursery and museum and how to make the aesthetic of the museum more open to young children. Our intention was to bring setting and museum together as part of a wider community; 'Yarmouth, the town that came out of the sea'. We selected objects to take into the setting including cork floats, weights, nets, rope etc. and considered themes including: transformation, connection, collection and water and actions such as floating/sinking, raising/lowering and weaving and how to use bodies and physicality to interact with objects and materials in tactile, kinaesthetic ways.

### **Pilling Park Nursery (PPN) and Norwich Castle Planning**

Artist educators also met with Steve Arbor, Formal Learning Officer at Norwich Castle, a larger organisation with less flexibility. Steve and the experienced education team have a comprehensive schools engagement programmes and the intention was to develop approaches to working with early years through this project, which would feed into and inform the NMS Keep Development Project and the design of its dedicated EY gallery.

We were not able to have permanent access to the education room due to other activity and were offered one of the larger gallery spaces for making and development of materials. We were also restricted by the opening times being unable to work outside this time. These arrangements did not prove practical as the gallery was open to the public and we had no access to facilities so an off-site space had to be found during the residency to develop materials.

The artists were given a tour around The Keep and galleries and were inspired by the scale and structure of this fortress space and particularly the historical graffiti engraved into the stone walls. We took forward concepts of time, story and mythological creatures, buildings, being enclosed or imprisoned and thought about how to involve the children in responses through interactive elements inspired by objects in the museum and by making the space performative, through building structures, movement and dynamic mark making.

### **Findings Residency 1 Priory Day Nursery (PDN) and Time&Tide (T&T) Museum:**

Some of the MA artists were very familiar with this nursery through the Early Years Music Team, which is based on the same site - this was beneficial in that there was already a lot of shared experience and mutual respect. It also affected the expectations of the practitioner educators who initially saw the residency as an extension of the music team's previous work. Expectations about what this residency might involve were varied combining excitement with some obvious concerns about the children's safety. We later learned this was more complex as most parents had not visited the museum before and were apprehensive. This project and its feedback provide valuable insight into some of the barriers to adults engaging with arts & culture, which could arise from feelings of exclusion due to financial cost, lack of knowledge, or thinking that the museum has nothing to offer them.

We spent the first morning at the setting being introduced to the children and looking at the spaces available to use. We wanted to incorporate inside and outside spaces - using familiar surroundings while providing an alternative focus. It was very beneficial to allow time to be in the rooms with the children and get to know them and experience how they interacted with their environments on a daily basis. Each room has access to an outside play space with a summerhouse in the centre, which we wanted to utilise during the residency. We decided to work with all children in each room over 2 sessions in the lead up to the installation at T&T, which would be attended by 10 of the older children from the Dolphin Room.

We thought about the transition; the walk the children, practitioners and parents would take from the setting through the streets of Gt Yarmouth to the T&T on the last day - an important journey full of expectation about where they were going and what they might do. The route and what they might take with them on the journey had to be considered as well as safeguarding considerations along the way and at the museum.

In response to the question 'what are your expectations?' at the start, we were given the following responses from artist and practitioner educators and museums staff:

Lorraine - Practitioner Educator:

*"I don't really know what to expect. Lots of interaction and fun. Don't know what would happen - imagined sea shanties. I wondered why we were going to the museum and what would happen. Taking them around will be lovely I thought we would just be in one room - looking forward to it!"*

Roma - Artist Educator Interactive Scenographer

*"Not coming with any expectations. I want to see how we play with materials, sounds and a bit of tech. Be open - a time to play like just now with this little boy who is playing with play dough: stars have turned in to balls and now he is covering his hands. He is developing an abstract relationship with the material starting with the shape of a star and getting a sense of the material - its texture and possibility. I want to do things that might surprise - interventions into museums where objects are used, moved and lifted and given a life of performance. In that space the objects are not doing that - they are contemplative. Abstraction in terms of the movement and performance quality."*

Zoe - Practitioner Educator

*"Expecting the children to experience musical things. Also remember conversation about 'cause and effect'. Exploring and meeting people from the museum. Are they coming here? Are the children going to run about - worried about that. Thought they were going to be in one room. Need to think about safeguarding - who else will be at the museum is it open to the public? Need to put the children in high viz."*

Sophie - Artist Educator Visual Artist

*"I don't know what is going to happen but something will. Positive perspective to start the week working with the familiar and the new. I've got some stuff - going to see what we all do and how we interplay. It'll be very beautiful and very good!"*

Charlotte - Artist Educator and doctoral student in EC (temporal arts as emergent knowledge)

*"I'm curious about developing this strand of work in spaces that aren't dedicated EY spaces. We have a particular aesthetic as EY artists. There are a lot of controls. Museums and Libraries have their own aesthetics which aren't EY orientated. How do we bring our abstract improvisational aesthetic into purpose-built spaces that are ordered labelled and taxonomised? Museums have done a lot of work on the ways their collections are organised to be more accessible. We have more to do with the temporal arts and performance. I have had a resistance to working in museums and library spaces - I think we can still have abstraction within these contexts but how?"*

Polly Ward - Museum Education Staff

*"Quite excited - good to see some different stuff done. Never done stuff with cameras and projectors. Interested in using different tech and using the spaces on a different way."*

Colin Stott - Learning Manager - Eastern Area Museums

*"Always looking for a way to make permanent displays interactive - interested in looking at our displays with a different eye, different vision. I don't have preconceptions - want to take on completely different perceptions. It's important that people from the nursery settings come with their families. Opportunity for local families and nursery staff to visit - the museum has lots to offer!"*

Abby Page - Artist Educator Dancer

*'I think a bit of discovery - interested to work with children of this age with movement and mark making and see what they can do with their bodies - what provocations bring out what responses in the children. The coming together of lots of different disciplines to create something and see what comes up.'*

### **MA Artist's Process - creating imaginative spaces in which to play:**

Using the Bridgwater Childcare Centre residency as foundation we aimed to develop performative improvisatory responses to spaces and people to highlight the legitimacy of the residency model during the Norfolk residencies. This approach involves making space to play and create and allow time to get to know the children over a few days, to build trust and deepen relationships. This environment allows children to experiment with materials and stimulates meaningful and beautiful interactions.

Planning allowed time for the 6 artists to meet at the museums in order to stimulate initial ideas about themes and approaches, which led to each artist collecting appropriate materials and technical equipment for experimentation. There was strength in the cross-disciplinary backgrounds of individuals and that the team comprised very experienced EY arts practitioners who understood the nature of a collaborative, intuitive approach.

*'When you've got an intuitive practice I'm not going to do planning in my sketch book or conscious thinking beforehand I'm going to do some stuff and then reflect on that.'* Sophie Fox - Artist Educator

*'I was in the middle of a John Wright workshop it was complete chaos I didn't know what was going on. It was the most joyful thing I have ever experienced. I was in it there was no back pocket - thinking oh I can pull something out - you are really, really in something'* Charlotte Arculus Artist Educator

The artists spent a day developing materials for each of the residencies and during this time developed the use of small white boxes to allow the children to curate objects from the setting, which could be taken to the new environment of the museum. We were interested to see how the children interacted with them and what they would choose to do with these containers. As a future extension of this activity it would be interesting to relate this to Chris Athey's work on Schema Theory, exploring the patterns in children's play. Children have different ways of moving and interacting with the world, organising, curating and contextualising their play. This activity leads us to start thinking about how children curate their play in unconscious, instinctive and intuitive ways.

We wanted to explore different ways of interacting with materials through movement inside and outside in both the settings and museums. Through free movement combining music and mark making on large sheets of cardboard we exercised small motor and gross motor skills. We also explored the use of lines and pulleys to hoist things up and down and creating playful elastic environments. The process involved bringing selected materials together in order to stimulate forms of transformation through the children's relationship and conversation with these materials and also with the spaces we were working in. We introduced puppetry elements where children animated objects within an imaginative environment.

We promoted an exchange of objects introducing some of the objects from the museum to the nursery setting allowing the children to play with museum objects within a familiar environment.

MA artists were interested in extending and developing the use of T Cam devised during the Bridgwater residency as a piece of technology that the children could be hands on with, playing with the central theme of Near & Far: observing things up close and at a distance via live feed to iPad and projectors.

We developed the use of song and sound as sonic/material connectors helping with transition from one space, installation, activity, happening to another by providing sonic and rhythmical continuity.

### **Testing the concepts:**

**Wednesday 3rd October Priory day Nursery working with 2 groups of children from: Starfish Room 2-3 years & Dolphin Room 3-4 years and practitioners educators.**



### **3 exploratory interactive environments:**

1. Wooden boxes in setting rooms - taking small wooden boxes into the rooms to explore children curating objects from their familiar environment. How will they interact with this proposition?
  - maintain 'no talking' principle;
  - developing use of song. Using the sea shanty 'Out of Yarmouth Harbour' for transitions and vocal sounds to signal connection with the children's vocalisation;
  - T Cam introduced to extend relationships.
2. Cardboard outside - large sheets of cardboard laid out on the play-ground with holes/portholes cut out offering crayons and chinks for mark making -
  - introduction of paint to change the interaction with
  - introduction of brushes of various types including on long poles to extend physicality and explore a different movement dynamic;
  - recorded musical accompaniment;
  - T Cam and iPad.
3. Summerhouse interactive installation -
  - wooden boxes with children's objects and cardboard boxes piled up;
  - introducing objects from the museum - floats, rope and buoys etc;
  - elastic stretched across and hanging gauzes;
  - cardboard covered walls and floor;
  - Sound interactive pressure points under the floor covering which played a selection of different sounds;
  - selection of musical instruments;
  - T Cam used to project live feed onto multiple surfaces;



- A basket of puppet fish with light-up eyes for the children to explore swimming around the new imaginary space.

#### Transitions - The Starfish Room:

Artist educators started outside this room with the trolley containing the empty boxes and T Cam softly singing the sea shanty requesting permission to enter the safe space. The children were apprehensive as we entered - this was the first few weeks of being at nursery and for some it was their first day. Still singing the artists took the boxes out of the trolley, opening them up and looking inside offering them to the children. This same song was used at the end of the activity as the artist educators collected the boxes full of the children's objects and put them into the trolley to lead the children outside. The boxes were then set up in the summerhouse and the children were led from the outside cardboard mark making using a rope which they could hold onto and we sang. It was noted that these periods were when the most anxious children were prone to cry, which underlines the importance of thinking and being careful with how you introduce change and make transitions. The children were led out of the summerhouse animating the puppet fish singing a new song 'Big Waves and Little Waves'.



#### Observations:

##### Inside the setting room

The box proposal initiated one-to-one interactions between artist and practitioner educators and the children. The young children were extremely nervous at first but as time went on became more confident starting to also interact with each other. A child played with one of the artist educators over a long period of time responding to invitations to play - placing objects on top of the boxes, putting them inside and closing the lids. Other children watched cautiously engaging with the strangers and new unfamiliar experience. The room was quiet apart from one child who cried intermittently.

A group of children withdrew behind the partition to safety of the enclosed reading space where they watched the live-feed from T'Cam on the iPad seeing the room and themselves in real time on the tablet. Slowly they started to move out of the hiding place into the room. There were twins in the room. One of the twins moved out to explore the boxes in the wider space and then took the box with her chosen objects back to her twin to look at. A boy who had stood back and observed became engrossed with T'cam moving the camera-eye about and pointing at the iPad monitor.

#### Outside

The same children who had been more forthright in the room were the first to take up the proposal and pick up the crayons starting to draw on the cardboard. Practitioner educators tried to engage the children by demonstrating. Lots of children stood back and watched. MA artists instigated movement proposals on the cardboard the children were tentative about joining in. There was a breakout with some children leaving the activity to play on the slide and this was not discouraged. The atmosphere started to become lighter once the group understood that they were free to come and go and find their own way back to it. A child developed the activity by bringing a truck onto the cardboard to fill with the crayons. The child who had been crying fairly consistently inside became engaged, watching intently. The boy who had been playing with T'cam inside started pointing at things outside - making the connection that what he was seeing on the screen of the iPad was reflecting his environment.

The music and introduction of large containers of paint were liberating - the children used their hands as well as brushes provided to spread the paint on the cardboard surfaces. The children called out unsolicited 'blue' in response to the colour of the paint. The activity extended the movement of some of the children who started to use their entire bodies in order to develop the relationships with the paint, brushes and surface.

#### The summerhouse

The children entered the space tentatively at first - taking in the familiar objects and new context. They climbed through the elastic strands with the artist educators exploring. Picking up and playing the musical instruments - particular fascination with the bells. Jumping rhythmically with the elastic. An artist educator responded to the sounds generated with her body starting a sound physical conversation. The children played together grasping the elastic and jumping. T Cam was used to observe the scene and project the live imagery onto the walls. The bells were rung to introduce a basket of puppet fish - each child was offered one to take with vocal sounds. They were led back inside accompanied by song.

#### Transitions Dolphin Room

The older children were much less anxious about moving from space to space and accepted changes as they were much more familiar with their environment. We replicated the same approaches as were used with the younger children. Putting the boxes away was led by 'hop, hop hop' vocalisations to encourage the children to participate in putting the boxes back into the trolley, which was pushed outside.

#### Observations

##### Inside the setting room

The children embraced this activity enthusiastically experimenting with the boxes in a variety of ways - opening and closing them, placing objects inside and on top of them. Stacking and organising multiple boxes and extending play with the body led by one of the artist educators who started rolling the boxes, giving them weight, putting them on her head. This experimentation was accompanied by unsolicited sounds and words e.g. 'spider!' The activity stimulated games which the children invented with each other and the artist educators - interactions with one other person as an intimate exchange and then broadened to include larger groups with more physical games. Encouraged to hand the boxes back to put into trolley at the end of the activity the children were rewarded with fun exclamatory vocalisations like 'Way-hay!'

### Outside

The children, artist and practitioner educators were very engaged and enthusiastic. The children were absorbed by using the different materials to make marks on the cardboard allowing the adults to stand back and watch at times. Artist-educators played with the children taking a lead from them. The movement with the chinks and then the brushes and paint was free including jumping, dancing and rolling etc. The practitioner-educators became visibly more relaxed laughing and participating on an equal level. Some children decided to branch out and play with other things in the garden. It felt as if we reached a free-flow state with all participants engaged communally, focused together yet autonomous. This session had a joyful affect, movement, sound, paint and bodies and brush and mark all combining into a mini opera of refrains in multiple modalities.

### Summerhouse

Older children more lively in this space exploring then environment - sound and movement through the pressure points. Rediscovering the boxes with their objects. Playing with elastic and using the percussive bells conversationally.

**Thursday 4th October Priory Day Nursery working with 2 groups of children from: Starfish Room 2-3 years & Dolphin Room 3-4 years and practitioners educators.**



A change of dynamic mixing up activities and including additions to the 3 exploratory spaces in response to the age and needs of the 2 groups of children:

1. Wooden boxes in the Setting Rooms - further exploration with both groups of children developing interactions and curation of objects.
2. Cardboard outside - transformation of the cardboard sheets marked with chalk and paint the day before by both groups by older children into a large boat -
  - lots of coloured tape as part of the construction process and also to entangle, link and transform the playground space;
  - silk banners and sails to extend movement potential and dynamic from the day before.
3. Interactive play dough - in the starfish room with the younger children exploring sound and light interactive responses.
4. Summerhouse interactive installation - further exploration with both groups.

The session was also attended by Polly Ward from the Time & Tide museum.



### Transitions

As the boxes were now known objects these were already set up in the rooms to start with. The summerhouse set up was simplified, taking out some of the elements to focus on the elastic, boxes T'cam projections and percussive bells. The children were much more relaxed on the 2nd day as they were familiar with the artist educators and the change of routine. This made transitions easier for the younger group as they were more confident and trusting.

### Observations

Inside the setting room the boxes were used more energetically and enthusiastically by both groups with children putting objects in and out, organising materials, stacking and constructing the boxes into complex arrangements. There was evidence of advanced playful experimentation - some children animated the toys in the boxes - a dinosaur roared and was silenced when the lid was closed. Great enjoyment was gained by selecting objects - 2 humpty dumpty toys were animated in and out of boxes ending with one in each box. The catches of the boxes proved of interest as they were absorbed with how to secure them closed.



### Cardboard Boat

Outside older children and artist- educators had fun constructing a large boat out of cardboard, which had been painted the day before, and tape. The multi-coloured tape took on a transformational life of its own being wrapped around other objects and people in the playground. The activity was accompanied by recorded music and sounds from the artist educators 'Ahoy There!' The children joined in on their own terms generally focused on the materials - quiet and busy. A chair was pulled into the boat once it had been made. The activity achieved a sense of free-flow with the materials undergoing multiple transformations. The boat was constructed and then deconstructed. Evidence of direct communication with and exploration of the properties of the material rather than requiring a specific end point or goal.



### Interactive Play Dough

While the older children were involved with the boat activity the younger children played with conductive play dough experimenting with making connections, which led to small lights on the end of pipe cleaners illuminate. During this session practitioner educators had not been asked to 'not talk' (which was an oversight) and film footage shows two children side by side with one child being verbally directed by an adult and the other being left to quietly do their own thing. The directed child appears hesitant and concerned with keeping attention on the adult. The other child is busy and focused using her own initiative exploring and discovering the possibilities of the material and technology with some physical co-operation with an adult.



### The summerhouse

Some lovely interactions with the boxes and the elastic - intimate one to one connections between children and artist/practitioner educators. The atmosphere was more relaxed for both groups but especially the younger ones second time around. Some of the T Cam footage from this session will be presented at the Reconceptualising Early Literacies conference in Manchester, March 2019.



**Friday 5th October Time and Tide Museum - a visit from 10 children from the Dolphin Room accompanied by parents and practitioner educators.  
An exploratory journey to and through the museum:**

The group of children, parents, practitioner educators and artist educators walked the twenty-minute route from the Priory Day Nursery to the Time and Tide Museum. The children wore high visibility jackets and silk armbands tied to the wrists and some of the adults carried white silk banners. As the convoy snaked its way through the town adults and children discussed where they were going and what they might see.

The journey was full of excitement and anticipation and provided time for children to immerse themselves in the transition from a familiar known environment towards something new, safely accompanied by parents and carers. Along the way adults discussed the best route and negotiated road crossings in a relaxed way. It was notable that the parents were made up of quite a high proportion of dads who were eager to explore with their kids.

The party arrived at the museum and were met by MA artists and museum staff at the gates who sang a welcome. After a short verbal introduction by Polly Ward the group were led into the museum via the toilets and gathered outside the Herring Rooms.



**Herring Rooms installations**

This comprised of two rooms on the ground floor of the museum. Reflecting the set up in the Summerhouse at the nursery setting the artists had set up an installation in one of the rooms which involved:

- found objects including baskets and nets from the museum's collection;
- an old tin bath found in the courtyard filled with water, lights and a water vapour maker;
- elastic stands stretched across the space;
- projected digital real time drawing on the walls;
- ship shadow puppets;
- basket of light up fish.

The children were led into the space with artist educators singing the Yarmouth Harbour sea shanty and given simple ship shadow puppets with built in light to animate on the walls. The room was dark and permeated with the age-old smell of herring, which had been hung and dried in this space. The children did not seem disturbed by this total sensory experience, although some of the parents found it difficult. Children and adults explored the space.

Transition to the sensory room next door was instigated by singing and rhythmically giving out the light up fish from a basket. This ritual echoed ones established in the nursery summerhouse the days before.

The second Herring Room involved encouraging the group to look up and appreciate the height of the space including the rungs where herring had been suspended and testing the new acoustics with sounds and singing. The performative engagement involved the basket being lowered on a rope from the gallery above to collect the fish and hoist it back up. This was carried out without verbal instruction - the children understood the game and participated wholeheartedly. The basket was raised accompanied by an improvised sung chorus which filled the space and gave one the sense of profound collective connection.

The group was then divided into two with half making their way upstairs to the Cabinet of Curiosity and half to the Yarmouth Street and Tin Town. The groups were changed over at a given point.



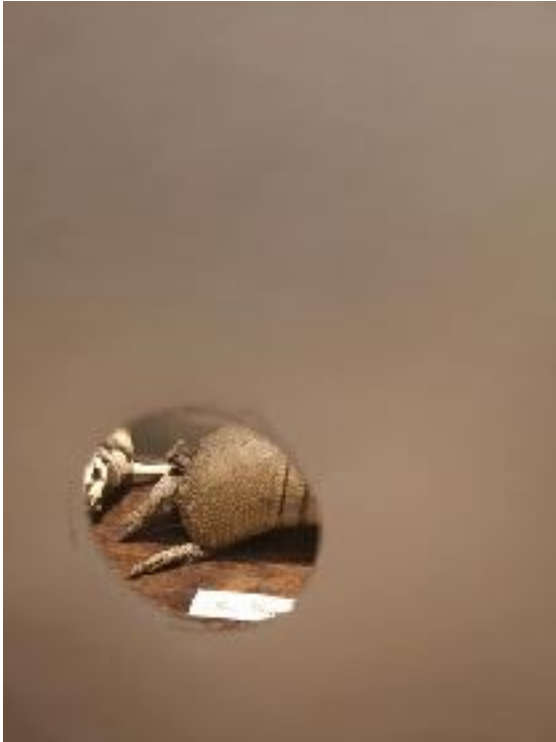
### **Yarmouth Street and Tin Town installations**

The white boxes containing the children's objects from the nursery had been placed in the rooms along the street.

An installation using the museum's collection of tin cans and food containers with the add-on of plastic animals, dinosaurs and cars etc. had been arranged in one of the rooms. There was also live projection on the ceiling videoing the set up in order to replicate the children's interaction with it seen from a different perspective.



The children and parents explored the rooms discovered their own boxes of curated objects with exclamations of delight, which then drew them into exploring the rooms in more detail. The boxes provided a familiar link to the larger scale and possibly scary collections in the rooms, which contains life size wax models of people within domestic and social situations. The children were able to pick up and touch their own objects and use their eyes to explore the rest of the space. They were able to fully engage physically and play in the Tin Town installation playing with the tins and toys creating their own arrangements, developing connections and influencing the space.



### **The Cabinet of Curiosity**

We wanted to play with perspectives looking at objects behind glass in one of the galleries upstairs. The gallery contains a odd collection of extraordinary random artefacts including preserved and stuffed animals and fish bodies, natural materials and man-made trinkets.

We covered the glass cabinets with sheets of white tracing paper and cut out holes at various levels so the children could peer into the space behind the glass and focus on individual objects as opposed to being confronted by everything at once.

The floor was covered by a rug with interactive pressure points that emitted sounds of the sea when pressed. Next to the larger formal cabinets we placed a smaller child height cabinet that contained toys, trinkets and objects which could be touched and played with.

The children engaged with this re-interpretation of the space eagerly looking through the holes at the objects behind and playing with the sounds from the pressure pads. Real enjoyment came from playing with the objects in the adjacent children's cabinet - taking objects out, inspecting them and then carefully placing them back.





### **Free play outside in the courtyard**

Finally, the groups were led into the central courtyard which had been set up with

- elastic stands stretched across the space,
- pulleys to winch up and down objects including a large cloth which concealed the cardboard boat that had been made in the nursery the day before.
- shallow containers of water with corks and boats,
- nets and various other artefacts from the museum's education collection scattered about.
- large parachute silk.

Activities included dressing up, painting with water with large brushes and waving flags. This was additional to the wonderful array of play boats and real boats which could not be played on already in the space. The activity was accompanied by exuberant recorded music and culminated in everybody playing together with the silk parachute.

There was a huge sense of release as the children and adults emerged from the museum to the outside space. The children scattered about discovering the objects and space jumping and running and exploring on a big scale. There was an audible gasp and great excitement when the canopy coving the cardboard boat was raised and the children recognised their handiwork. They loved rediscovering this in the new environment.

The practitioner educators were very enthusiastic and joined in wholeheartedly with one member dressing up in a sou'wester and becoming a sea captain. The parents held back and were more shy about joining in.

During this activity we collected comments from parents who did not want to be videoed and some from the practitioner educators:

#### **Comments from parents at Time & Tide**

'was alright'

'lived here 16 years just round the corner and never been here'

'brilliant - liked the sensory thing. Would have been good for her younger sister'

'hated the smell'

'stinks - I would have vomited if I'd been pregnant'

'really good - loved the outside - being creative and imaginative'

'walk went really well'

'want to do more of this'  
'good transition to and from'  
'liked the dark room - was surprised they all went in the darkroom really well'  
'all exploring today'  
'never been here before'  
'when people think of museums they think it is boring'  
'children joined in and they learned more and know what it's about'  
'had fun'  
'really interesting - all the different halls they used and everybody liked the noise pad - the children didn't want to leave seeing all the different holes'  
'not what I expected'  
'didn't know it was so big'  
'I knew the museum was quite interesting'  
'I think the outside was best has entertained them. More than being inside - educational'  
'surprised by the room with the fish hanging - all the smells'  
'didn't like the dark rooms'  
'quite enjoyed the street but he was not paying much attention to the other inside stuff'.

### **Comments from practitioners at Time & Tide**

'was amazing'  
'interactive'  
'liked white boxes'  
'lived up to imaginative expectation'  
'lovely to watch them - to see the boat they had painted - they must have thought there is our boat!'  
'I like the not speaking - let the children do their own thing'  
'child-led'  
'everything was great - simple but so creative'  
'anybody could do it - you just got to have that thought process'  
'we are a good team'  
'giving them freedom and seeing what they make of it'.



**What can take forward from the Priory Day Nursery Time and Tide Residency experience? inc. responses to a set of feedback questions and referencing the key research questions:**

**• What do we discover/learn when we put children at the centre of an open exploratory artistic process?**

*Young children are exploratory by nature* - when we put children at the centre of the process we learn new ways to connect with objects materials and spaces through their innate knowledges. When given the space young children have direct and uncluttered relationships and communication with materials, which are not confined by the need to achieve immediate results.

*Young children have unique knowledges and understandings of the world* - this process was facilitated by MA artists from various disciplines providing the initial stimulus generated through individual and collective responses to the environments. These concepts developed into a playful structure, which involved offering a series of open-ended proposals to children in the nursery setting. The proposals made space for the children to create their own miniature curations and make their own artefacts to present at the museum. It enabled them to exercise different modes of physical and imaginative expression through their various interactions with and through the materials, puppets and objects. The children's investigation included rolling phases of creation/ construction and deconstruction. This process familiarised them with abstract concepts in a whole-body way so that when they came to experience the unfamiliar environment of the museum they had gained confidence and already devised ways of engaging with it. Artist-educators learned from the children about a directness of communication with materials, objects and technologies exploring cause and effect and relationships with the environment.

*'I like that it's all about the children. The children are exploring things themselves. We love anything that benefits the children. They learn a lot from this sort of thing. They can join in if they want to and they don't have to if they don't want to. Great to see their little faces - shall I do this or shan't I? Nobody is going to say don't do that, sit down or you're not listening. They can do what they want'.* Lorraine - Practitioner Educator

*We need to give them permission to play* - the ethos of the work also gave permission for the children to opt out of the activity if they wished. There was no expectation or agenda about what constitutes taking part - children could watch or go and do something else if they wanted to, and re-join at any point that suits them. This can be hard to do within an educational framework as it means relinquishing control.

*We need to support young children's exploration/learning and not direct* - MA artists' approach involved 'not talking' which allowed space for the children to respond and explore on their own terms in an undirected way. The benefit of this method was clearly identified during the interactive play dough session with the younger children.

Observation from video record: Two children side by side with one child being verbally directed by an adult and the other being left to quietly do their own thing. The directed child appears hesitant and confused. The other child is thinking with the materials exploring and discovering the possibilities of the material and technology, *through* the materials and tech rather than being shown and directed. There is an adult nearby who is listening and learning with the *child* (paying attention) without speaking.

The residency was about taking an arts-based world facing approach. The experiences were linked and about the space and the people, but they were not about 'educating' or being didactic. Our intention was to create an interesting, surprising and different experience for all involved. It involved practices of improvisation and collaboration over many modes.

*'All consuming, joyful, absorbing and aesthetic experiences that have been very profound. Excitement waiting for the children to come and then seeing them do things. I learnt from the children'.* Charlotte - Artist Educator

• **What is the role of materials and scenographic technologies in developing EY arts practice?**

Artist educators arrived at the nursery with a selection of materials which are readily available and familiar such as cardboard and tape and also some new objects, materials and technologies. Working with the children and responding to the spaces the simple materials were used in different and expressive ways going through a series of transformations.

*'We improvised - turned up with some bags of materials to explore what would be possible in the space. Also responding to the expectations of the space and of the practitioner educators and museums staff.'* Jaz - Artist Educator

*Developing knowledge and communication through physical transformation of simple materials - cardboard sheets became the canvas for expressive mark-making, which involved children using their entire bodies dancing with the paint and brushes. This material transformed again into a boat like structure which was eventually taken to the museum.*

MA artists learned from the process of creating the boat, which involved the children collectively developing an understanding of transformative actions with materials – i.e. movement to mark-making, to 2d to 3d constructions that led to performative action and the journey to the museum. The process also offered them permission to enjoy deconstructing/destroying this object in order to start again. Interestingly they were not precious about the finished product engaging in a rolling process of experimentation and exploration with the materials.

The connection with simple materials was also explored in the way the children used the tape outside during the boat making process, which developed a physical conversation with the space and a vehicle for self expression.

*'They loved playing with it - we were all part of the structure taped in. There was one child constantly swinging the tape. I was watching her. Then she was twiddling it. Then she started to twist it around herself. She was pushing the tape because that was her thing. That was different - you don't normally get to play with sellotape - it's not allowed to play with tape like that.'* Lorraine - Practitioner Educator

*Developing connections using transformational and transitional objects - alongside the use of ordinary materials artist educators also introduced some distinct new objects. This included the little wooden boxes, which were pleasing to the children as objects in themselves.*

*'They enjoyed the boxes - the weight of them: putting things in and stacking them. You wouldn't think of doing something like that. They liked it because they were weighty boxes and they wouldn't usually use something like that - they are used to cardboard and stuff like that.'* Lorraine - Practitioner Educator

Exploring and developing physicality through conversations with objects and materials included big expansive movements and small interactions with precious things collected in the boxes and the child-size cabinet in the museum. These containers mirrored the museum style of curating and presenting collections affording the children agency within an unfamiliar environment and allowing them space to contribute physically and imaginatively.

*The boxes were an epiphany - I have a resistance to purpose made spaces - I like blank boxes and abstract things. The Time and Tide and Castle Keep are beautiful spaces and it was fascinating to bring these little boxes into the museum filled with the children's curation. The little box spaces had been moved about and become familiar friends to the children.* Charlotte - Artist Educator



*Expanding possibilities using Interactive and digital technologies* - to make surprising new connections and offer new perspectives. Physical interaction with the play dough and pressure sensor pads stimulated sound and light responses which were fun and in conjunction with the use of simple materials gave the children agency in the space e.g. 'if I do this, then this will happen'. T'Cam, the roving toddler proof camera, provided a way for the children to appreciate the shift of perspective seeing the real environment around them translated into 2 dimensional digital form. In a world where children are constantly stimulated by screen life where interaction is nonexistent, T'cam offers a way for children to understand the connection the digital world has with reality and provides opportunity to physically affect outcomes.

The residential experience is all consuming for all participants. The week rushes by in a whirlwind of creative activity, but it is Important to remember this was a research and development process and as such not meant to produce beautiful finished articles. We were taking chances, making leaps into the unknown and learning from the children. We as artists trusted and became absorbed in the explorative experience.

• **What do we learn from the Near & Far residency model about process and relationship building?**

The process of creating and exploring the familiar and the new in the nursery setting and then moving to the museum, which represented an entirely new space for the children and several of the adult participants, provided keys for unlocking the potentially intimidating experience. The children had already explored concepts within a known environment and took this knowledge with them, which seemed to give them some sense of ownership, familiarity and ritual.

*'A space like the museum it is very easy to enter into and not feel ownership because you are being asked to absorb too much information. This process has enabled participants to enter the museum (which is very good and stimulating) and extend outwards through the children's interactions'.* Jaz - Artist Educator

*'I loved the way you bought the things that were familiar to them here - the toys in the boxes and the boat they had made for example. Some of our spaces can be quite intimidating but because there were those familiar things it made it easier for the children'.* Polly - Museum Staff

*'We develop a process of 're-curation' which was about being abstract in the museum space and allowing invisible connections to be made between objects that aren't necessarily connected by their theme, time or place in history. We created a journey and made some invisible connections. Thematic lines and boundaries blur and the connections become boundless. Everybody is then given the space to have their own response and everybody's response is valid. It is not about right and wrong, historical facts or getting the names right.'* Charlotte - Artist Educator

*Developing cross-sector relationships in the long term* - there was concern that the residential experience was a bit like parachuting in, creating something wonderful and then leaving. MA artists learned from feedback from practitioner educators that they endorsed input in this way finding it a valuable way to introduce new concepts and shift from the daily routine, but that in the long-term additional regular input over a longer time-frame would be very beneficial.

*Providing information and resources* - Practitioner educators also fed-back that there were elements and activities they would like to incorporate into their rooms using the readily accessible materials and that they would find instructions and resource packs helpful.

*What were the barriers to developing relationships and creative work in nurseries?*

- Involving parents and getting them on board with messy activities *'A lot of the parents don't like the messy play. We make posters saying bring old clothes but it's always been a barrier. A lot of the parent don't do it at home so it's trying to get them on board. will be interesting for the parents tomorrow. Really looking forward to seeing how the parents react and get involved.'*

Head - Nursery Setting;

- Lack of time to build trust between all participants. Working over a longer time frame would enable participants to get to know one another and discover new ways of doing things which might be different from the experiences they are used to. *'Today they really loved it in the summerhouse whereas yesterday they were not so sure because second time around they knew it.'* Lorraine - Practitioner Educator;
- Timing of the residency as for the younger children this activity was too close to the start of term and the beginning their nursery experience *'quite scary for the younger children during the settling in period.'* Head - Nursery Setting;
- Practitioner educators feeling under-confident or outside the process could be addressed by involving practitioner educators in the planning stages, and reflection time so they an integral part of the process;
- Ensuring a level playing field where everybody's expertise is valued - offering accessible cross-sector CPD opportunities;
- Costs and time out from busy work schedule to participate in training factoring in costs relating to Backfill.

Over a longer time-frame, artist-educators could integrate more with the routines of the nursery and learn from knowledges that practitioner-educators have of the children.

*'It is about building a relationship with the kids but it also about building a relationship with you. Leaving stuff with you. We weren't too sure how much involvement you wanted from us. We didn't really ask what you needed which is actually just as important. Then you get, we all get a great experience!'* Sophie - Artist Educator

The exchange of knowledges is relevant for parents who only became part of the process on the final day for the visit to the museum with little understanding about what they were participating in. Some parents were uncomfortable about visiting the museum, perhaps feeling excluded from it, but they were led into the experience by their children who did not have the same preconceptions. We need to take care of the parents coming into these immersive environments, which are all about the children and reassure them that their children's responses are alright and give them space and a role in the process. We should learn from the way MA artists provided pathways for the children to engage with new experiences and extend this to a consideration of ways to engage with their parents. This could include more contact with parents; involving them earlier in the process. This was addressed more fully at the following Castle Keep and Pilling Park residency

*What are the benefits and challenges developing relationships and creative work in museums?*

Feedback from museum staff underlined the validity of shared knowledges:

*'Been good from my point of view to see the different ways you have worked. Sharing ideas - there is a load of stuff that I can incorporate into what we are doing here. I now have a link with the nursery because I went there yesterday.'* Polly - Museum Staff

Polly Ward cited that there were challenges for them with this type of work - the biggest being fitting in around their school visits as they are so busy.

*'School numbers are a big factor and there is pressure on museums to get a certain amount through. Today we couldn't have 90 kids in, but actually this has been way more worth while. I would argue in the future for stuff like this to happen'* Polly - Museums Staff

The nature of working with EY is that including too many participants does not work practically and does not make for a quality experience. The case needs to be made for nurturing multiple curious, intimate child-led experiences in arts and cultural spaces, which include participation with parents and carers. The intergenerational benefits associated with working with our youngest children spans communities and reaches the broadest and most diverse sections of our society and addresses deep-seated barriers to engagement with art and culture. This project has taught us that we can and should learn from young children. They can teach us to be full of wonder - open and exploratory - and lead us to fundamentally reassess our relationship with the world.