

Promoting the Inclusion of Pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties in Creative Arts

Samantha Johnson, Sunningdale School

Background

Sunningdale School is a community special school in Sunderland which caters for children aged 2-11 years with profound, multiple and severe learning difficulties. Some of our children are also on the Autistic Spectrum and many have physical and medical needs. At Sunningdale our children are taught through a 'person centred curriculum'. We believe learning should begin with the child and encourage our children to engage in learning at their own level through 'hands on' learning at every opportunity.



Statement of Focus

Within our School Development Plan senior leaders had identified the need to improve accessibility to learning opportunities in the area of Creative Arts for all pupils across school, with an emphasis on establishing opportunities for pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) to engage with relevant Creative Arts opportunities. The current school focus on Creative Arts emphasised the need for an additional school improvement team focussing solely on this area, entitled 'Be More...Artistic' which in turn created my role as the Be More...Artistic School Improvement Team Lead.

Development Process

I was eager to form cultural partnerships with arts-based organisations by creating community links.

The importance of doing so is highlighted by The Cultural Learning Alliance in their document 'ImagineNation: The Value of Cultural Learning' within which it is stated 'Schools that partner with cultural organisations and artists are offering truly outstanding opportunities to their students.'

Initially this seemed a daunting task especially as the school hadn't had any involvement with the creative arts sector for a prolonged period of time. To overcome this, senior leaders appointed Jane Shaw whose work focuses on supporting creative practitioners to grow their own business. Jane's role was to identify and commission



creative practitioners and/or arts-based organisations that were able to meet my project requirements. This relationship in itself has been invaluable in the success of the creative arts projects we have undertaken.

As part of my initial audit it quickly became apparent that whilst there were some ongoing opportunities across school for children to take part in creative arts based clubs, projects or performances, many of these were deemed to be most suitable for our small cohort of more able children. Many staff also lacked confidence in their own creative arts skills and therefore relied on specialist teachers or external coaches. Following the audit, I began working towards implementing a range of arts-based projects and staff CPD opportunities to improve all children's access to learning opportunities in the area of Creative Arts.

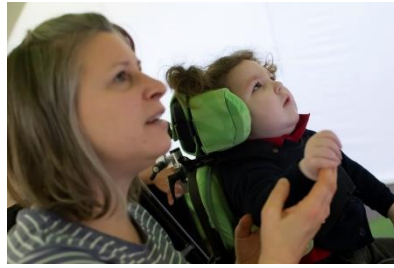
I chose to spend a lot of time on the planning stage of these projects before implementing them in school as I felt it was important to foresee any potential issues and resolve these before the projects took place. To ensure each of our children would get the most out of each Creative Arts based project, I chose to split the children into cohorts dependent on need. Although our children are usually taught in mixed ability classes, I felt this way of working would have the most impact as well as being less overwhelming for the visiting artists. However, this posed several issues in terms of logistics which needed to be thought through and resolved through discussions with colleagues. With the support of Jane I was then able to create a timetable of projects to take place across the rest of the academic year.

The first two projects timetabled to take place in the Spring Term were for our children with PMLD. Prior to commissioning these projects, I had determined several aspects they would need to utilise to ensure they were appropriate for the needs of these pupils. I asked for the artists to have an awareness of early developmental skills, include multi-sensory elements and focus on the creative process rather than the creation of an end product.



The first project took place in January when Bamboozle Theatre Company visited our school. Bamboozle delivered a performance tailored specifically to the needs of our children with PMLD. The performance incorporated several 'wow' moments where the use of multi-sensory components resulted in the high engagement of the children.

The second project for our PMLD cohort was a movement-based project delivered by Green Croft Arts. The project incorporated the use of an interactive installation where the children were supported to engage in physical movements whilst accessing the digital and musical elements of the installation. Green Croft Arts also delivered a staff CPD session for my school improvement team which focussed on how best to support our children to access dance and movement.



Reflection

Both projects were very successful in fostering pupil engagement, as well as promoting the interest and enthusiasm of the staff involved. During the projects staff collected photographs, videos and written observations which evidenced high levels of pupil engagement. Teaching staff were then able to link these to the different areas of the engagement model and children's personalised learning plans where appropriate.

On reflection I believe the success of these projects was due to several factors. The first being the endorsement from our school's senior leadership team, who were responsible for the creation of a new school improvement team, appointing Jane Shaw, allocating both my time and a sizeable budget. The second being the time spent planning prior to the projects which ensured the commissioning of relevant practitioners. The third being the creative practitioners' high levels of skill and experience, which highlighted the importance of commissioning artists with specialist knowledge around SEN/D or a willingness to engage in further training. Finally, the allocation of key staff was vital in ensuring our most complex children had full access to each project with one to one adult support.

As a new middle leader, the process of developing and implementing these projects has increased my confidence in my own ability to lead a team and form cultural partnerships through collaborative working with creative arts practitioners and other professionals. Our school development in the area of Creative Arts is ongoing and following the success of these projects, we are continuing to develop arts-based projects for our other cohorts, as well as further opportunities for staff CPD.