

## St Joseph's residency

I approached the residency with a focus on broadening the children's access to Arts and Culture and deepening their discussion of Arts and Culture

My approach was to work directly with each class in school to establish a relationship with each child and each member of staff. I also focussed on getting as many arts and cultural activities into school as I could; as well as getting the school out to as many arts and cultural events as possible. The fact that this residency was spread over 18 months and two academic years meant I was able to see the take up for some events increase: more children went with their parents to the following year's event.

Continuity helps establish ownership

*The Arts become Ours*

I quickly established contacts with the Gateshead Arts and Libraries Culture team and let them know St Joseph's was 'open for business'. There have been years of cuts in funding for the arts and schools are seeing it as less of a priority, so cultural organisations are keen to work with and support schools who are interested in the Arts and Culture. Sage have an extensive schools program and the Baltic run many free workshops for schools as well as for children and their families. By engaging the children in arts and culture over a sustained period, they have gained sense of ownership that allows them and their families to access the arts and culture around them. This overcomes the barrier that a lot of arts and cultural venues struggle with. Even though they are free and open the public many people are put off because they don't feel it's for them or that they won't 'get it.' My first job was to broaden the scope of art and culture to included music, theatre, dance, film, graffiti, computer games, football, fashion, celebrations, parades, birthdays, the Great British Bake off; or as Brian Eno put it in his 2015 John Peel lecture "my *definition* is quite simply art is *everything* that you *don't have to do*."

### Bringing the Outside In

I worked out a plan with Karolynne Hart from Gateshead and Libraries Culture Team to involve St Josephs in a number of projects. It was the 30<sup>th</sup> year of the Gateshead Family Sculpture Festival and St Josephs is within walking distance of Saltwell park so it seemed an obvious project to start the residency with. We held workshops both in school and at the park and hoped to get parents and children along on the day. This was not only a success that year but more children and parents got involved the following year as well. The same happened with Enchanted parks. The fact that the artists involved in the event came to work with the children meant they felt part of the whole process and got their families involved as well.

The Heritage project we got involved in helped to deepen the children's ability to engage with and discuss public art. By working with sculptors and visiting some of the public art close to school, the children were able to have a debate on public art with a greater depth of knowledge and level of confidence.

The school now have an ongoing and growing relationship with Juice Festival. With my contacts and St Joseph's willingness and openness to 'give it a go', we managed to get a

last minute three day residency with Thimble collective. This project created content for a live all night time TV show. I picked up on the interest and enthusiasm generated by this residency and set up an after school movie makers clubs. Juice continued to work with St Joseph's throughout the residency, bringing in artists and helping groups go out to events; they are now in the process of planning this years projects.

### Highlights and Finale

Working across the whole school over such an extended period means there were a lot of projects to talk about and I'm only going to pick out the highlights for me in terms of the impact my practice made and how well we I met the aims of the residency.

#### Movie makers, iPads and apps

The after school movie makers club channelled the enthusiasm generated by the Thimble residency and gave the children the chance to develop their dramatic skills, their story making skills as well as their media and animation skills. I used the school iPads and apps to generate some of this creative media expertise in lessons as well. This expertise is something the children can show the teachers and is an exciting exchange of learning

#### Creative Response

Some of the classes I worked with had a specific area of the arts they wanted to explore or develop more skills in, for example: I took Year 1 to the library gallery to look at the exhibition and do a drawing workshop. Other classes followed a more exploratory, Creative Response approach, that investigated Arts and Culture. Year 4 took this on and made a number of creative responses to one of the films made by a group of Y5 pupils in the Movie Makers club. This process of making something in response to what one of the other groups has made allows everyone to enter the process of working out what the Arts and Culture mean.

#### BFG

I took this process of Creative Response one stage further by setting up a week long project using the soon-to-be released film the BFG as a stimulus. Year six were given a suitcase to investigate. The suitcase had various objects inside and a letter to discover. The objects were all clues to who might own the case. The letter was addressed to the children asking them to capture dreams for the BFG. They worked in groups to make a response to this which meant they made models, wrote poems and created songs. The trouble was they didn't have time to finish their work so they had to take everything, including the suitcase and letter to Year 5 and ask them to carry on and add to their work. Year 5 then took everything to Year 4 and so on until the suitcase and all the work arrived in Reception. Year 6 then worked with Reception to finish off the dreams for the BFG. This process of creating, sharing and working together gives children the chance to deepen and broaden their understanding of creativity, the Arts and Culture. One group made a dream printer that could print out people's dreams. Another made goggles to put

on so you could see what the BFG could see. The fact that the end results were a collective creation made them all the more ingenious and surprising.

#### Art and SOLE

I wanted to find a way to draw all this to a conclusion and mark the end point of the residency. I thought, after the BFG work, of an exhibition of the work the children have made through the 18 months then I came across a project the University of Newcastle were running with the Baltic that seemed to fit with what I'd been exploring at St Josephs. The brief was to use Self Organised Learning Environments to explore and investigate Art. This was a similar process to the one I'd been developing with Y4 so I chose the same class to do this final project with. I was not only impressed with the level of autonomy, communication and group skills the class showed but also by their confidence in generating and asking deep and meaningful questions. I judged the success of the whole residency on one particular moment during our visit to the Baltic. A group of children were being asked what they thought of the project for the documentary the University were making; the film-maker was then going to interview me and ask me what I thought but the children intervened and asked if they could ask me the questions instead. It wasn't just the fact that the questions they asked were really interesting and difficult, it was the fact they had the confidence to ask in the first place, in a place that was, or could have been, culturally intimidating

#### Next Steps

I have seen an increase in the level of confidence the children demonstrate when talking about Art and Culture. They have also developed some artistic skills and explored their creativity. I've seen a tremendous increase in the confidence and skills of my main contact in school, Joanne Thompson, and I'd like to think this will spread to some of the other members of staff as they continue to get involved in more Arts projects. I feel the gates have been opened and the school now have some very good experiences of successful projects to give them the confidence to do even more.

John Quinn  
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