



EVALUATION OF THE CREATIVITY AND CRAFT COURSES



Gillian Taylor
Catherine Aberly

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For further information about the evaluation contact:
Gillian Taylor, Institute of Health & Community Studies, Bournemouth University,
Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 3LT.
Tel: 01202 962170. E-mail: taylorg@bournemouth.ac.uk

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Executive summary

This report describes and analyses the development of the creativity classes run on behalf of Sure Start Weymouth and Portland (SSWP).

Literature review

Some of the ways in which taking part in artistic and creative activities can impact on an individual's health have been identified through research. An HEA review (1998) of arts projects found these included 'increased sociability (through friendships), self-esteem, personal development, confidence, and the improvement of mental health.' The authors of the review also identified three main evaluation approaches: health-based, social-cultural and community-based, which this evaluation drew upon.

The philosophy behind the courses

The tutors described the importance of creating a safe environment and the supportive ethos of the classes. They emphasised that SSWP parents did not need conventional artistic talents to benefit from taking part. The courses' artistic aim was to encourage adults and children to enjoy creative activities by being playful and experimental while a second aim was to enable participants to work together in groups.

Details of courses run:

The *Square Mile* courses.

These ten-week courses were based in each of the four SSWP areas. The aim was for parents and children to explore their local area and to see aspects of their everyday environment more positively ('with new eyes.')

Mask making: The 'Making faces' project

Practical work involved the participants layering newspaper to make a base mask, learning how to use papier mâché pulp and to decorate their mask. Possible backgrounds and lighting for the participants to take photos of their mask were also considered, making the courses multimedia.

Courses in *Mosaics*, *Creativity*, *Storysacks* and *Fun ways to record your children's early years* were also run by the same facilitators for SSWP.

Methodology

The main focus of this evaluation was the two *Square Mile* courses. Data was drawn from a number of sources including a semi-structured interview with the two tutors, evaluation sheets for the 2002 courses and the substantial evaluation that the tutors built into the courses, including 'visitors' books.'

Findings

Ways in which parents and their children felt they had benefited

The participants' responses included increased sociability (through friendships), self-esteem, and confidence, as well as learning more about the area in which they live and an increased creativity that was reported often to spill over into home life. For their children, the benefits included getting used to being in a crèche and learning new skills.

Participants' comments taken from the Visitors' book

The comments showed a high level of enjoyment and demonstrated the benefits of the course in the participants' own words. They also show that the *Square Mile* course helped promote imaginative and creative writing skills amongst the parents who participated. Responses fell into the broad themes of having fun, promoting creative play with the children, promoting reflection and writing.

The socio-cultural aspects of increased artistic skills and the community development aspects of these courses were also important outcomes.

Reasons that some parents did not continue with the *Square Mile* courses

The main feature identified by respondents to the questionnaire was 'found time inconvenient'. The facilitators were aware of some participants whom they thought had stopped coming for practical reasons. This suggests that some parents will need a variety of practical and emotional support to continue to attend courses, in particular those bringing two or more children on foot.

Size of the classes

Classes were located in each Sure Start area so that parents did not have to travel but this meant that some classes were too small to reap fully the benefits of group work, sometimes containing a total of only four or five participants.

Exhibitions of the 'Square Mile' work in 2002 and 2003.

An estimated 300 plus people attended the 2003 exhibition over eight days. The feedback from those parents and visitors who did attend concerning the work in the exhibitions was generally very positive.

The role of the art classes in meeting SSWP objectives

By 2004 the primary objective for Sure Start nationally had changed from boosting child development and parenting skills to improving social and emotional development and promoting parents' employability. Sure Start management felt that these targets had been met by the *Mosaics* classes in both direct and secondary links.

Cost effectiveness

The creativity courses were relatively expensive because they often used the skills of two tutors as well as play workers and included the cost of new materials. This expense was clearly a factor in SSWP deciding not to commission any more courses despite positive evaluations.

Conclusion and recommendations

Generally the creativity classes were of a very high standard and an innovative development for Sure Start. The difficulty of measuring and quantifying the beneficial outcomes for parents and children should not be used as a reason to discourage other organisations from running similar courses.

A recommended solution would be to attempt to safeguard the benefits of the creativity courses at reduced cost by using a single tutor and larger premises that could accommodate larger groups. Greater use could also be made of peer-assisted learning.

Introducing a questionnaire on depression, self-efficacy and self-esteem that could be readministered at the end of the course would be useful in establishing gains in these areas.

The Creativity Courses (Art, craft and mixed media)

Introduction

This report describes and analyses the development of the creativity classes run on behalf of Sure Start Weymouth and Portland.

It contains a brief literature review, describes the courses that took place, some of them in detail, gives the aims of the evaluation process, analysis of the data, a discussion and a conclusion.

Sure Start aims to run activities that stimulate juvenile social, physical, intellectual, creative, emotional and sensory development (SPICES) and one of the core services provided by Sure Start is 'play, learning and childcare'. Within these services Sure Start Weymouth and Portland, subsequently referred to as SSWP, initially proposed that 'links will be developed with the Community Arts Development Officer to involve parents and children in local projects and to develop a Scrap Store/Arts Centre' (Weymouth and Portland Sure Start Plan, 2001: 70). In consequence, from the formal launch of SSWP in 2001, a number of courses promoting creativity have been run by the two facilitators, until they came to an end in 2004.

Literature review

Some of the ways in which taking part in artistic and creative activities can impact on an individual's health have been identified through research. In 1998 the Health Education Authority commissioned SHM productions to carry out a review of arts projects and interventions entitled *Art for Health: A review of good practice in community-based arts projects and initiatives which impact on health and wellbeing*. The report states that 'this range of work has been occasioned by the recent emergence and development of theories of social capital that place emphasis on social inclusion and connectedness as one of the major determinants of health and wellbeing' (HDA 1998:1).

The review process utilised a questionnaire sent to all identified projects as well as visits and semi-structured interviews with a smaller sample of these projects. It produced a number of interesting findings, including the fact that 91% of the 90 projects that returned questionnaires stated that their work contributed to health improvement by developing people's self esteem and 65% stated that their work enhanced community development by improving participants' quality of life. The review also found that 'the development of interpersonal skills, opportunities for making friends and increased involvement are among the most important contributions to health that projects can make' (HDA 1998: 5). To summarise, the HEA found that 'increased sociability (through friendships), self-esteem, personal development, confidence, and the improvement of mental health were identified by an overwhelming number of projects as benefits of participation in arts projects'.

Many projects also reported the '(informal) educational value of their work to both participants and in some cases the wider local community, particularly in raising awareness of health issues.' (HDA 1998: 17).

The authors of the review also identified three main approaches used in the evaluations:

- A health-based approach linked to testing the degree to which arts/creativity projects can contribute to wellbeing and self esteem, which in turn may have an effect on participants' health
- A social-cultural approach based on considering the social benefits of arts projects as well as the importance of the finished art product
- A community-based approach based on understanding the role of arts initiatives in building social capital.

These findings and approaches are all of potential relevance to the evaluation of the creativity courses run through Sure Start.

Creativity courses within Sure Start

'Arts' projects do not appear to feature very frequently within Sure Start as a national programme and searching the central repository database under 'art,' 'craft' and 'creativity' produced no matches. However two related projects were subsequently located, the 'New Audiences development programme' between Oakengates Theatre and Lawley Plus Sure Start and a research and evaluation report for Sure Start Foxhill and Parson Cross on developing a *Storysack* project. (*Storysacks* courses were also run for SSWP). These sacks contained a fiction book, a non-fiction book linked to the story and a variety of props which were designed to help children learn through play. These props included scenery, a toy or puppet and might also include videotapes and prompt cards to help parents use the materials. Parents chose to make all the sacks themselves which then formed a resource for other parents to use.

The Lawley Plus Sure Start project included participatory workshops for children in drama, circus skills and music and puppet making. Linked to this was a programme of theatre visits, some of them free, and family arts days. It was reported that the project served to increase the incidence of theatre visits and improved parents' confidence. The need to provide child care for babies and very young children was considered a vital prerequisite for the parents to attend theatre with their older children. However this project did not seek to develop parents' creativity in quite the same way as did the SSWP creativity classes.

The following section includes an explanation of the ethos of the creativity courses run for SSWP and their aims and outcomes.

The philosophy behind the courses.

One of the tutors described the importance of creating a safe environment and the supportive ethos of the classes:

You do it and you enjoy it and there is no right and wrong. It is very experimental. What we try to create is a completely safe environment where the results are far less important than the taking part. So whatever you come up with, whether it be by design or accident, is valued highly by other members of the group as well as by yourself and by us. I think it is very exploratory..... (Interview Weymouth creativity class facilitators, 2003).

They emphasised that SSWP parents did not need conventional artistic talents to benefit from taking part.

There is no need to be able to draw. People have a thing that you have to make something look like something else, well you don't. And actually if you can create a line or expression or whatever that sums up the feeling rather than being the object. We are not so much interested in the object, rather the sensations and what it makes you feel, that sort of creativity.

Aims and outcomes

The artistic aim of the classes, as articulated by the facilitators in one of their reports to SSWP, was to encourage adults and children to enjoy creative activities by being playful and experimental and to use these creative mediums to express themselves. The second aim was to enable participants to discover something about working together as adults, as children and as adults and children together. The facilitators expressed the hope that working collaboratively and being supportive of one another would help participants to recognise the things they found more difficult and to discover some strengths.

Expected outcomes included the hope that participants would:

- Discover and enjoy the creative process and use the knowledge and skills learned to encourage and support their children
- Work with and have fun with other parents in a relaxed and supportive environment
- Exchange ideas and develop friendships
- Work as a group member
- Gain confidence in their own ideas and talents
- Discover the joy of trying something new.

Details of the creativity courses run

A variety of courses were run for SSWP parents, two of which were externally researched and visited and these are described in some detail below.

The *Square Mile* courses.

These ten-week courses were based in each of the four SSWP areas: Westham, Littlemoor, Melcombe Regis and Portland and run across the summer holidays. The aim was for parents and children to explore their local area and to see aspects of their everyday environment 'with new eyes.' Originally called *Y filltir sqwar*, a Welsh expression that the tutors used to describe the first five years of our lives as being the *time when we know more intimately than at any other time the landscape and surroundings we might call our home.* The courses were partly set up in response to the existing perceptions of residents who, when asked about their area, had responded only with negative comments e.g. about dog fouling or litter, and so were designed to encourage more positive perceptions.

The classes encouraged participants to look closely at *our environment and our neighbourhood, from architecture to ants, from colours to coast, exploring textures, sounds objects and language and about thoughts about all these and more, in the form of documents, gatherings and images, including photography to construction, voice and body and mark making* (Extract from course flyer, 2002).

A different pack was created for each session that participants could take away if they wished. The instructions were quite loose so participants did not have to attend the class to take part in a particular activity. However it is possible parents might have to be more highly motivated to take part at home without the encouragement and peer support available in the classes.



Mask making: The *'Making faces'* papier mâché project

A series of ten followed by six workshops, all of two hours, was run by one of the facilitators in November-December 2002 and again in April-May 2003. Sessions were repeated in Littlemoor and at SSWP central office.

The first session provided a pack by way of introduction and the first exercise was for participants to write down some of their favourite things in order to lead them into 'a more positive thinking space.' Practical work began with the participants layering torn newspaper to make a base mask on a plastic frame. In subsequent sessions participants learned to make and use papier mâché pulp and to decorate their mask with string curls, decoupage, mirrors and beads. The concept of gilding was introduced and possible backgrounds and lighting for the mask photos were considered.

A visit from the researcher confirmed that the resources provided for students were extensive and imaginative. They included different coloured glitters, textured papers with silk, shiny paper and tissue, many of which were in a lever arch file for neatness and accessibility, as well as natural materials such as bark and leaves.

SSWP provided a digital camera for parents to use as well as two disposable and a reflex camera. The digital camera gave the tutor the opportunity to select four of the best shots to print onto acetate so that each class member could choose the one she preferred. Parents always take away a physical reminder of their own and other participants' work from the courses. This has taken the form variously of a calendar and a book.

It was proposed that acetate pictures of their masks, taken by the parents themselves, would be used as source material for Christmas cards and decorations. Post Christmas the photographs would be used as part of the front cover of a book of their work. Participants were also encouraged to keep a notebook of their thoughts and ideas on each workshop.



The sessions took place in a relaxed atmosphere and the class included a break for tea and biscuits. The tutor offered encouragement but also allowed students carry on with their masks in their own way. Physical constraints included the fact that at Littlemoor, the room was a little small for the participants' desks and chairs, which made it difficult for the tutor to come round to them individually. The children in the crèche occupied the much larger main hall. It was the first time for some participants that their children had been looked after in a crèche so this was an important first step in promoting their child's independence.

Fun ways to record and remember your children's early years.

The tutors tried to encourage new parents to take part in the creative classes through visiting existing SSWP activities to explain the *Children's early years* recording work.

The tutors' aim was that these short demonstration sessions would give parents an opportunity to try out some creative methods of documenting their children's early years. They visited existing groups with examples of their ideas, such as making a cloth sampler of outgrown children's clothes on brown paper labels and painting a 'wellie' with permanent marker recording things heard and seen, perhaps the weather or new words the child learned that day. Plaster casts and charcoal drawings of children's feet were also made. 'Try-out' packs including treasure boxes and creative albums were given to parents to make at home. It was proposed that three sessions would run per week for two weeks, making six in all.

Mosaics, Creativity and Storysacks courses were also run by the same facilitators for SSWP.



Attendance at the courses

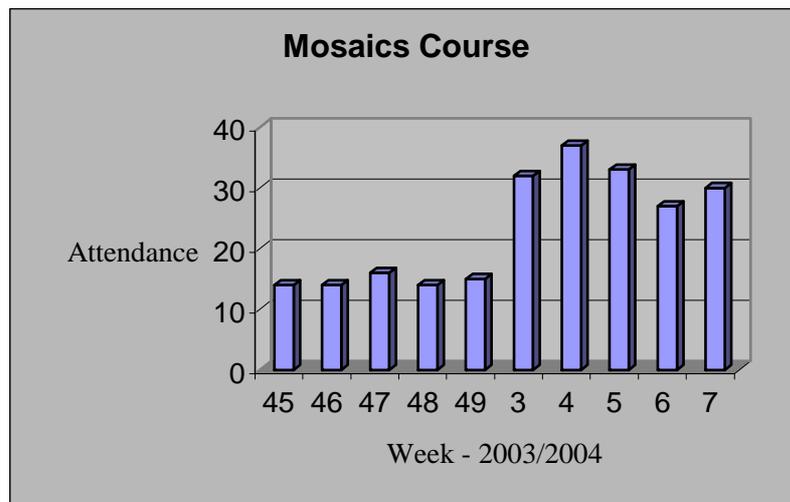
Attendances for a number of the courses held during 2003 and 2004 are shown below. This gives an indication of which courses were the most popular, together with the average attendances. It should be noted that the attendance figures

include children as well as adults and may include courses running at more than one site.

The **Creativity** groups held between October 2003 and February 2004 show a total of 76 attendances, the majority of which took place during January and February 2004.

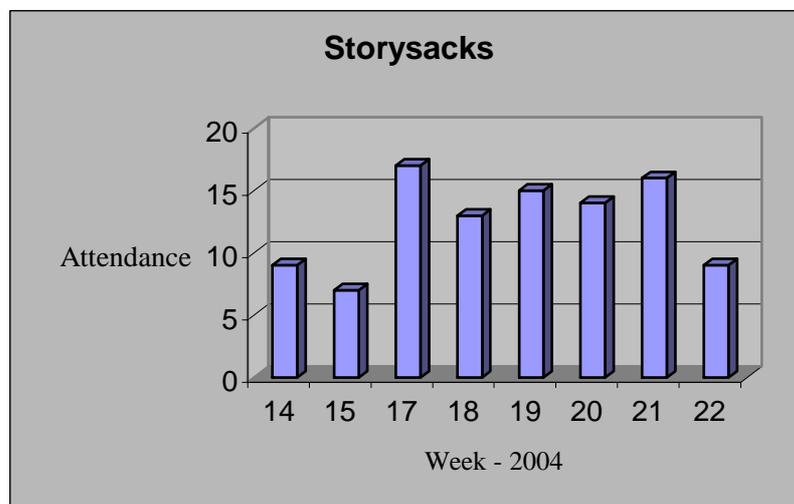
The **Mosaics** course held between November 2003 and February 2004 attracted a total of 232 attendances. As with the Creativity group, the majority of attendances were during January and February 2004 (figure 1).

Figure 1.



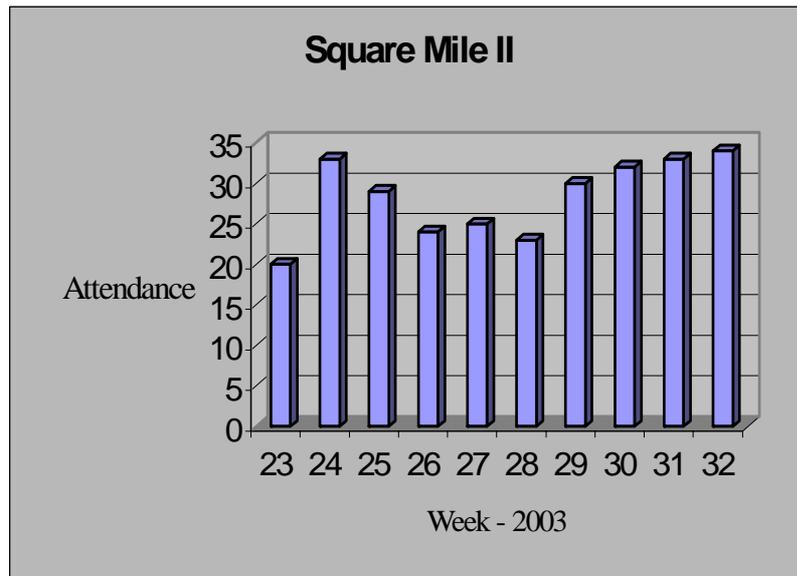
The **Storysacks** courses held between April and May 2004 show a total of 100 attendances. The attendance for *Storysacks* was generally consistent through the whole of the course, although the first two and last sessions were less well attended (figure 2).

Figure 2.



The first *Square Mile* course held between June and August 2002 attracted a total of 26 adults and 38 children, although this is an aggregate of attendance at the classes held in each of the four areas. The *Square Mile II* courses held between June and August 2003 show a total of 283 attendances, including both adults and children. Attendances ranged from 20 and 34. Most attendances took place during August 2003 (figure 3)

Figure 3.



Evaluation methods

Aims

This art course evaluation aims to:

- Describe the range and scope of the courses provided
- Locate the projects within the evidence base
- Utilise elements of the health-based, social-cultural and community-based approaches identified in the HEA review
- Identify whether and how the courses are helping families in SSWP achieve the targets which are set for Sure Start services
- Look at cost effectiveness issues.

Methodology

The main focus of this evaluation is the two *Square Mile* courses, because of their scope and amount of data available from them but also because they included participants' developing an appreciation of their immediate surroundings and thus included community development aspects.

The evaluation uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches and accordingly data was drawn from a number of sources. A researcher visited the *Making Faces* II sessions in Littlemoor and at Sure Start central office in the summer of 2003, as well as *Square Mile* II sessions in Littlemoor and Portland. She also visited the Weymouth Arts Centre to view the parents' work and the ways in which it had been exhibited.

The same researcher interviewed the two course facilitators using a semi-structured interview guide and this interview was subsequently analysed and data used in this report. Evaluation sheets for the *Square Mile* courses in 2002 devised by the SSWP Deputy Manager were sent out to each participant, and 12 returned. Entries in the 'Visitor's books' devised by the facilitators in which parents wrote down their immediate impressions of each session of the various courses, and the exhibition of Sure Start parents' work held in August 2003, have also been included and categorised into broader themes.

Building in evaluation to the courses

This report draws upon the substantial evaluation that the tutors built into the courses and their own course reports to Sure Start. The tutors were concerned about how best to capture participants' perceptions. They had tried a variety of methods but felt that the visitor's book was the most successful and also worked in its more traditional role of inviting visitors' comments on the two exhibitions.

Last year we had the system of people writing their comments on their luggage labels but that wasn't formalised enough, because we got them from people who contributed work right at the end, so it wasn't ongoing, whereas the book keeps it as an ongoing thing.

Sure Start did a questionnaire which we all talked about and decided that there might be things that a lot of the parents wouldn't feel they would want to say to us, things that they might not be happy with but we have had that come back to us since.

They were concerned not just appeal to the extroverts but to give everyone on the course a chance to give feedback.

I am just thinking about people who write comments in the book. Some people have said 'oh I don't know what to write this week'. Well that's fine you don't have to. But actually some of the people who are slightly less confident still write in the book, so that has been quite a workable method.

Findings

The *Square Mile* courses

This section considers the parents' and facilitators' perceptions of the courses and what they felt they had gained both personally and creatively, as well as issues that were more problematic, such as whether parents and children should undertake the classes together or separately, and recruitment and retention. It draws on findings from the evaluation sheets devised by Sure Start, parents' comments and data from the interview with the course facilitators.

There were a variety of areas identified by those parents who completed the evaluation sheets as the 'best part' of the 2002 Square Mile course. This range of responses made this data somewhat difficult to evaluate as it covered a number of different categories. However analysing this data into themes, some of which were used by other evaluations such as the HEA, revealed that comments broadly divided into:

- Content and benefits of particular session
- Benefits to parents (generally to mothers since few fathers were involved) such as doing something for myself and building self esteem
- Benefits to children such as getting used to being in a crèche
- Social benefits such as making new friends.

When asked what they liked least:

The main issue identified was the timing of the sessions, mainly due to the difficulty of getting children to eat their lunch and be out ready for a 12.30 start. 'Mornings would be better or later in afternoon'.

Some mentioned their least favourite session but this did not represent any sort of consensus so no conclusions can be drawn from this data.

Ways in which parents and their children felt they benefited from the *Square Mile* project

The tutors hoped that parents would achieve both personal and social development through the classes and also that children would benefit from seeing their mothers doing something for themselves.

...they will feel more confident. I hope they will feel they've broken a few barriers and made friends. I hope they would have had fun with their children. I hope their children see the mothers doing something so that they are not in that 'looking after me' role. I know they are probably quite young taking that on board, but sometimes you know, seeing, someone taking time for themselves and doing something. It makes them see that everybody should play, to see their mothers playing and to start playing together.....(Interview Weymouth creativity class facilitators, 2003).

This was echoed in some of the participants' responses who, when asked on the evaluation sheets how they felt they had benefited, again gave responses including increased sociability (through friendships), self-esteem, and confidence, as well as learning more about the area in which they live. Relating more specifically to the courses, responses included increased creativity that was reported often to spill over into home life. The area most frequently identified with was 'being creative' followed by 'meeting new people' 'discovering more about the area I live in' and 'getting out of the house'. For their children the benefits included getting used to being in a crèche and learning new skills. Many of the respondents, when asked for ideas on how Sure Start could be improved to suit their needs, used this question as an opportunity to praise the *Square Mile* project, as the most frequently identified were 'loved/enjoyed the project, please run it again'.



Comments from participants taken from the Visitors' book written after each session

The comments show a high level of enjoyment and demonstrate the benefits of the course in the participants' own words. They also show that the *Square Mile* course helped promote imaginative and creative writing skills amongst the parents who participated.

Having fun

The silliness has returned. Felt good to just throw brollies to the wind and see what happened.

Slimy seaweed slipping smoothly and soaring through the scenery. Lovely excuse to play, what a giggle. Plop. jump and throw.

Enjoyed getting messy and enjoyed using body (arm) as art. It looked amazing, almost like elephant's skin.

Two weeks of staying up till 11, waking up at 6.30 to continue doing yet more art work when I should be decorating and getting tea ready on time, or so my hubby says. All good fun, the children love it.

Drip, splash we're filmmaking by the sea... true freedom with no one around to hear my shrieks.

It made me do things that I wouldn't normally do. I got so into it, painted myself red and blue. At school the teacher had made me feel so bad, said I had no talent. Does it matter? I can't draw. Other people say it's a chance to express yourself. The word 'art' frightens people; even small children. Classes provide creative ways of exploring your environment.

Promoting creative play with their children

Great fun. Opens the eyes to a new interpretation of the world around us. Must do more with the children.

Inspirational. Gave me plenty of ideas for the children to have a go at home.

Story boarding. Took my son out to film a superhero action movie. We both had a great time photographing, climbing, scrambling, shouting etc. How much fun can you have within our square mile without spending?

Enjoyed it. Got creative with the playdo. Have good ideas, will have a go at home, perhaps take some photos to bring in.



Promoting reflection

I will never see my place like I used to see it.

Today made me notice how little time I spend as an adult doing nothing but looking and listening.

Writing

Wasn't as scared of the writing as I was last year. Enjoyed combining words we collected to make a weird poem.

Write, write write. Actually this is the best session yet. I liked getting messy and pretending to be a child for the afternoon.

The preferred model of provision for both adults and children

This was an important question that was raised frequently within the different creativity courses. Some of the most important learning for the tutors had been the need for play workers to engage with the children while their parents were involved in creative activities. The need for this extra provision was suggested to them by Sure Start management.

Absolutely fundamental. And also fundamental that those play workers are onboard with the philosophy and the ideas of the project because that makes a huge difference. So they also take the initiative with the children in getting them to do similar activities. ... (Interview Weymouth art class facilitators, 2003).

For reasons of continuity the tutors felt it would be better to have a single play worker rather than a variety, but this may not have been logistically possible due to the other demands on their time.

The first year we had somebody who I think did 3 sessions whereas this year we have had different play workers for each session, which has meant that they've got this learning thing to do each time. Rather than seeing it 'at the first session' oh right that's what we are doing, okay I'll do....' they are prepared for each subsequent session, whereas new workers do quite a lot of learning to see what we do this week – 'oh we are doing that'. Whereas if you have one person doing the whole thing – it is one of the suggestions we might make that we have one person who does it all.

The majority of the respondents to the evaluation sheets felt that they would like future arts projects to be held 'for parents and children separately but at the same time' but other parents identified the category 'for parents and children together' while others again identified both of these categories. Some parents felt that some sessions were more suited to children, others to parents and children

working together, while others felt that it was better for children to do 'arty' things in the crèche so that parents could concentrate more on their own creative endeavours and relax more. If the rationale behind the art classes is that parents learn to play creatively with their own children, then joint sessions might be the most useful option, with the play worker demonstrating and helping children's skills development.

One of the tutors expressed the view that this model worked well but that it was not possible to have one model of provision that would suit all sessions and all parents.

I think this thing about the children as well, that they share that play time, but that it is constructive and they are not too responsible. They are responsible for their children, but they haven't got complete responsibility so it is shared out. I think that has worked quite well. It is always a little controversial point, whether there is a crèche, whether there isn't a crèche, how much the play worker is involved, how much the play worker isn't. I think that is just something that we all accept we have to work on each week according to who's there....

In fact we have had one person saying 'I want the children more involved'. And when that person has gone somebody else will say 'Well actually, I treasure the time, to do this.

In their qualitative responses to the evaluation sheets the participants felt there was a balance to be struck with the children taking part. Parents felt that their children had done more this time and they didn't have to worry about them because the play workers were there to help.

Don't want to force children to do things that are not suitable for them, like photography but children are always able to do something. A modified version can be done at home with them.

Developing participants' creativity and confidence

The facilitators emphasised that the differences in style and approach between them gave additional ideas to the participants and the role they played in developing parents' creativity and skills.

I guess that sometimes when you have been at home for quite a long time looking after your children, you can forget what your other skills are and so I think that maybe they could find other ways of discovering some skills, It is very informal in that way. But I do think they find new ways of expressing themselves because they constantly tell us how surprised they are at some of the things they have done. ... (Interview Weymouth art class facilitators, 2003).

In this instance they also emphasised the quality of the finished 'product'.

People still say 'I can't write, I'm not a writer', and yet we've got masses and masses of writing, far more than is up in here. Easily a book's worth and some really really lovely stuff. I think that is really important.

The process of giving feedback to parents

The facilitators had experimented with different ways of giving feedback to parents to further encourage them and were promoting quite a lot of informal dialogue.

And then we have selected comments and put them in as part of our weekly feedback. I think our feedback to the parents is often to keep that dialogue going so it might be that they get it in the post. Often, to incorporate something they have done so it comes back to us in some form and then it goes to them in some form and actually one of the parents has then put it all together for the exhibition and written something back again, So it is going back and forth.

Partly as a result of this model parents had also asked to give feedback to each other which should help to develop their critical and social skills.

Issues of attendance, retention and recruitment

Attendance at classes

Approximately 50% of the attendees on the first *Square Mile* course also attended the second. The tutors felt that the second time round participants had generally gained in confidence and were more willing to try new things and to encourage others to do the same.

They also identified varying patterns of attendance with some parents only attending the first or last few sessions:

I think also if we say' it doesn't matter if you come to one or 10' then maybe we have to accept that a bit as well. So we have to say well actually coming to 3 that's fine, maybe they only enjoyed 3. So it is a bit of a balance between not thinking that, they have to be involved because it is the ultimate thing, but also if people aren't coming and there is something we could do...

Reasons that some parents who started the *Square Mile* course did not continue

The main feature identified by respondents to the evaluation sheets was 'found time inconvenient', which was also identified as the main feature of what was liked the least about the *Square Mile* course by parents. Bad weather and the classes not providing enough to occupy the children were also identified.

However the tutors felt that 'dropping out' was not a meaningful concept but that attendance had been more consistent for the second course.

There is no such thing as dropping out...

We've hardly had anybody not see it through this time but last year we had quite a few more and we really tried to follow it up but it is very hard, without feeling that we were badgering people.

They described two participants who they thought had stopped coming for practical reasons:

Well I have spoken to one lady who came and the reason was she had brought someone else's little girl with her plus her own son, plus her daughter and I think she just found it was too much for her. She said to me she found it too stressing, trying to do too many things at once.

There was a classic case last year, a woman with a little boy who was 2 and a baby and she didn't have a buggy board and I think we can safely say she stopped coming because she couldn't manage the two children going out and about together because the little boy was really a bit too young to be doing all the walking. Because I think it was just unmanageable but I don't think it was because she didn't want to come.

They made the interesting point that:

I think just for some people it doesn't take much for it to become a difficult project to do.

This suggests that some parents will need a variety of practical and emotional support to continue to attend courses, in particular those bringing two or more children on foot.

Promoting the classes

The facilitators had given a great deal of thought to how to promote the classes and how to make them seem accessible and non-threatening.

It is very tricky. We have thought about door to door things. We are also kind of not sure how much is our responsibility actually.

The mums have quite a strong opinion on it. They always say the word 'art' is what will put a lot of people off. But actually we don't use that. We were very clear about that last year. So that's very much that everybody calls it the art class. We couldn't have gone to more lengths to say it is not an art class.

The fact that SSWP initially was in the process of recruiting many new workers inevitably meant that not all of them were familiar with the creativity courses. The

facilitators thought it would be useful if they promoted the courses more with these new Sure Start workers.

Formalising things a bit more, just a bit ahead of when we start. And now we know that, we will say that we would really like to come and talk to the staff about what we are going to do over the next 10 weeks.

We have to take the initiative in that our project isn't everyone's priority, it is only our priority. So maybe next time we will say we would actually like to meet all the play workers and occupational therapists because that would set it up.

They also felt it might be useful for them to come to parents groups to promote the courses.

And maybe the other thing is if we get ourselves to a few toy libraries and the toddler groups, and introduce ourselves. But I think it is more about the other parents who have done it. I think they are more likely to get people to come.

How to recruit the hard-to-reach families

The facilitators commented:

But of course most of the people we are talking about are behind their front door. So maybe if we did a taster session in Somerfield on the stand where they do the cheese tasting, I think we really have to go in...

Another issue relating to recruitment was that the parents who attended the classes were often also those who were involved in other groups.

The only thing that I sometimes wonder is whether a lot of the people who come to the art class are also the people who are very involved in the parent groups, so they are people who are the real doers. And if there is any kind of school reminiscences for people then I think that in itself could be a little bit off putting. Like if you were never in the top set and you see the top set doing everything, that might put you off even though we don't have that philosophy within the group, I still wonder whether it might exist. . . . There might be that kind of fear of going into a little bit of a clique.

The tutors felt that a good display space would be helpful in attracting new people. They didn't feel that the Sure Start central office at Federated House had the space to display parents' work to its best advantage.

Confidentiality and levels of involvement

For the facilitators there were issues of confidentiality and not knowing the parents' background and any particular problems they might have, and also how to deal with difficult situations they might hear about in classes. They felt they were probably in an unusual position in being not employed by SSWP but having

lengthy contact with parents. They also felt that they could contribute more if they were more involved with the main objectives of Sure Start e.g. in planning and developing games to use to develop children's language skills in conjunction with the Sure Start speech and language worker (SSSLW). One of the tutors had arranged for some materials to be developed and some parents who might help the SSSLW with that task

Practical considerations

Size of the classes

Many classes were located in each Sure Start area so that parents did not have to travel but this meant that some classes were too small to reap fully the benefits of group work. They sometimes contained a total of only four or five participants and *Square Mile II* classes at Littlemoor and Westham sometimes comprised only two parents and their children.

Length and content of sessions

The majority of the respondents to the evaluation sheets identified two hours as the ideal length for the sessions, although some parents felt that half an hour at the end for tidying up would have been beneficial.

There were other comments from the evaluation sheets on improving the service, including 'knowing from the outset what form each session will take' and 'to send or give info about what the classes involve in advance' suggesting some participants would have liked more warning of what they would be expected to do in each session



The two Exhibitions of 'Square Mile' work held at Weymouth Art Centre in August 2002 and 2003.

The culmination of the two *Square Mile* courses was the exhibitions held in 2002 and 2003. Parents' and children's work from the first exhibition was subsequently displayed at the SSWP offices, on the walls and on a laundry stand, to give more Sure Start parents and staff the opportunity to see it. The second exhibition differed from the first in that the tutors involved parents more in the planning, asking for volunteers in the physical work of displaying exhibits and stewarding the exhibition. However one unexpected result was that the tutors found that supervising others increased their own workload.

An estimated 300 plus people attended the exhibition over the eight opening days. Publicity was extensive, including an 'arts trail' in which work was displayed in a variety of local shops with clues leading to the next venue and finally to the exhibition. However attendance was probably constrained as it emerged that a number of local people did not know where the Arts Centre was and unfortunately parents in the Sure Start areas not directly involved in the classes did not attend the exhibition.

The tutors felt it would be beneficial to put artwork on permanent display in the places where the classes run so that more people could have the opportunity to see it.

People from Weymouth don't come to the Art Centre; they don't even know it is here. This work should be in all the Sure Start areas, it should be in Littlemoor, it should be on Portland, it really should travel around. I think that would make it much more accessible.

The tutors also commented on the difficulty of getting students who had only attended a few classes to exhibit their work.

They've either seen it through or participated right at the end. It is very hard to get people to contribute their work who only took part in the first three weeks, and that suggests that they don't feel that their work is as valuable.

Parents' and visitors' comments on the second Exhibition, taken from the visitors' book

The feedback from those parents and visitors who did attend concerning the work in the exhibitions was generally very positive.

A joyful exhibition. The quality of the work and the ideas are truly remarkable. Exhilarating.

Great to see so much creativity being unleashed and very touching to see it coming from mothers and their children

I don't much like the term art exhibition. It carries with it the idea of formality and prescribed methods. This is definitely fun turned into art. For me anyone can do it. The only requirement is to enjoy what you do.



Discussion

The role of the art classes in meeting SSWP objectives and milestones

One of the difficulties in assessing how far the creativity classes have helped to meet its targets is that central government has altered these since the inception of Sure Start. However the targets remain as indicators that the programme is making progress on some key dimensions in the lives of children and families in the Sure Start area. They have developed from boosting child development and parenting skills in 2001 to promoting parents' employability in 2004.

The facilitators anticipated that the creativity courses would meet existing Sure Start objectives by helping the parents to enjoy learning and playing with their children. The skills gained would be witnessed and shared with their children, supporting the target of promoting:

Early bonding between parents and their children and a good quality of play, learning and childcare experiences for children (2001).

As stated, by 2004 the primary objective had changed to promoting parents' employability, which could be met through either a direct or indirect link.

Sure Start W & P targets and activities (September 2004) contains the following objectives:

Service Delivery target. Improving social and emotional development.

Sure Start management felt this target was met by the Mosaics classes in a direct link.

Public Service Agreement target (locally determined): Caring for and supporting mothers with postnatal depression.

Increase and develop the skills of parents to enable them to obtain paid employment and to develop links with Job Centre plus.

The Mosaics class was thought to provide a secondary link to this target, possibly by promoting the growth of self esteem and confidence in parents attending the classes.

Cost effectiveness

The cost effectiveness of the courses remains difficult to assess. As Pamela Meadows suggests:

‘All resources have alternative uses so unless resources are being used cost effectively in one setting then better outcomes could be achieved by using them differently. The responsibility to use resources efficiently and effectively stems from this principle. The decision to devote resources to the activities funded under Sure Start means that a higher priority has been attached to these activities, both locally and nationally, than to other activities which could make use of the same resources’ (Meadows 2001:1).

It appeared that the classes were relatively expensive because they sometimes used the skills of two tutors e.g. the Square Mile courses, as well as play workers in some cases, and included the cost of new materials. As an example, costs to SSWP for a ten week course, including materials and tutors’ salaries and expenses, but not including play workers or accommodation, were £4,500 in 2002. This expense was clearly a factor in SSWP deciding not to commission any more courses despite positive evaluations.

The issue of the planned scrap store is interesting because had it been developed it might have helped to reduce the materials cost element of the classes. Using lower cost or free materials might also have made it more likely that parents could continue to work with their own children at home. However the main factor in the expense of the courses was the use of two tutors and the relatively small size of many of the courses, again partly because of the necessity of locating them in each SSWP area.

It is interesting to note that the classes took place in a context where the argument that art and craft classes generally are worthwhile in themselves because of the social and self esteem development aspects has become increasingly difficult to sustain within adult and liberal education aimed at the general population. Flower arranging and interior design classes are now tied to qualifications and documentation emphasises the need for all courses to have clear progression paths and enhance career development.

Although in this case it is impossible to quantify the benefits to parents and their children and thus to carry out a cost benefit analysis of the courses, growth in confidence and self esteem were expressed by many of the parents and

documented by the facilitators and researchers. The acquisition of skills meant that mothers took part in more creative activities with their own children at home, at least for the duration of the classes. The socio-cultural aspects of increased artistic skills and the community development aspects, particularly of the *Square Mile* courses, were also important. Although the tutors emphasised that creativity and the social and personal development aspects of their classes were paramount, the HEA review (1998) points to the desirability of the finished art work being of a high standard. This criterion was generally met in these projects and evidence for this was provided by the comments of visitors at the final exhibition, and by visitors asking if the pieces were for sale.

Another issue to consider is whether the growth in self-esteem engendered by undertaking a creativity course is more profound and longer lasting than that engendered by a course expressly tailored to that end e.g. a MYEC (Make your Experience Count) course or the ISECCA classes (Improvements in Self Esteem and Confidence for Children and Adults) developed by Dorset GP Anne Hayden. Some ISECCA classes were in fact run for Sure Start parents but on a smaller scale than the creativity classes. Another similar course is STEPS (Steps to Excellence for Personal Success) but in this case participants are asked to evaluate their personal efficacy and self esteem on a scale of one to ten at the beginning and again at the end of the course so some measurement of the benefit can be obtained. As a tentative answer to this question, evidence from the Workers' Educational Association *Hostels and refuges education project* suggests that, at a time of crisis in their lives, women chose craft courses rather than a MYEC, possibly because the craft courses seemed less threatening and more practical. It appeared that these classes still achieved the same result of improving participants' self esteem and confidence but by a more indirect route.

Conclusion and recommendations

Generally the creativity classes were of a very high standard and an innovative development for Sure Start. The difficulty of measuring and quantifying the beneficial outcomes for parents and children should not be used as a reason to discourage other organisations from running similar courses.

A recommended solution would be to attempt to safeguard the benefits of the creativity courses at reduced cost by using larger premises that could accommodate larger groups and that courses did not run until they had recruited a minimum number of parents. However, one difficulty here is that since no payment was involved, parents who registered would not necessarily always attend. Some parents enrolling for both *Square Mile* courses, as a reported 50% did in 2003, is another issue that needs to be examined in ensuring that Sure Start resources are distributed equitably. Greater use could also be made of peer-assisted learning, a development which the facilitators were fully supportive of. The use of more than one tutor in a relatively small class, despite the obvious benefits, is likely to be unsustainable financially.

Introducing a questionnaire on depression, self-efficacy and self-esteem that could be readministered at the end of the course would be useful in establishing gains in these areas. It would be hoped that this process would not deter potential participants from undertaking these innovative courses.



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