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## **Visual rhythms: Facilitating young children's creative engagement at Tate Liverpool**

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### **Authors' biographies**

#### **Naomi McLeod**

After many years of teaching across Early Years and Key Stage 1 in Liverpool and Cheshire, and as a Deputy Head teacher, Naomi led Early Childhood and the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Early Years Teacher Education programme at Liverpool Hope University. Most recently Naomi is at Liverpool John Moores University teaching across Early Childhood and Education Studies and leading the MA in International Approaches to Early Childhood Education. Her doctorate focused on developing pedagogical participation for young children and Continued Professional Development for teachers and early years professionals across the sector. This continues to be a research interest evident in her published work and in the working partnerships she has developed with educators and creative professionals in the field of Early Years, creativity and participation. Naomi is currently working with Family curators at Tate Liverpool nurturing a sense of self through artwork as a provocation for philosophical enquiry. She also engaged in the initial stages of a collaborative comparative study involving 4 universities looking at the 'multiple identities of Early Childhood students for a quality workforce'.

#### **Denise Wright**

As a teacher, consultant and artist in residence in the Liverpool community for more than 15 years, Denise uses a range of creative approaches to engage children across a variety of settings, including residential settings for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, mental health services and more recently working with very young children and their parents in different early years settings. As part of her PhD, Denise has been working closely with Tate Liverpool, liaising with organisations and supporting nursery practitioners, children and families. In this role Denise has supported the gallery to better understand the needs of young children and families visiting the gallery, particularly children and families from marginalised communities. Recently Denise has been commissioned by Tate to develop and lead the Tate Family Collective, a new initiative for engaging families. Denise also lectures in Early Years and Inclusive Education at Edge Hill University.

### **Katy McCall**

Katy McCall works as a Learning Curator for Early Years and Families at Tate Liverpool. In 2012 she established Tate Liverpool's early years programme and has worked closely with a team of creative practitioners and artists over the last three years using Tate collections as provocations for exploring possibilities with young children. Through her work with families and children from the local community and partnerships with local children centres and nurseries, Katy has facilitated bespoke creative opportunities for young children using Tate as an extension of the learning environment. She continues to engage in participatory action research as a way of evaluating her own practice. She is currently planning a project at Tate Liverpool around promoting 'Readiness' and well-being of young children through visits to Tate Liverpool and working with parents.

### **Michiko Fujii**

Michiko has an MA in Art & Design in Education from the Institute of Education, and is an Early Years specialist who has developed and delivered award-winning Early Years and Families workshops, projects and exhibitions. Her practice focuses on the interplay between people and materials in different spaces and incorporates creative, collaborative, and playful, large-scale, immersive installations that explore materials, light, shadow, projections, sounds, textures and movement. As a freelance artist and educator at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, Tate Liverpool and the Hepworth Wakefield, much of Michiko's work includes developing and delivering creative learning programmes and workshops. Currently she works as a Early Years Coordinator at the Whitworth and Early Years & Families Learning Curator at Tate Liverpool.

### **Abstract**

This paper sets out to demonstrate the creative engagement of a group of three and four year old children at Tate Liverpool Art Gallery and how this was facilitated. The paper starts by providing background on the project at Tate Liverpool and to a pedagogy of engagement. In doing so its value of creative engagement within the context of gallery education and the perceived barriers that can sometimes prevent or restrict young children's engagement are acknowledged. It progresses to show how artworks were used as provocations for encouraging children's creative engagement as part of workshops in the gallery space and the creative engagement signs that were observed. Vignettes of children's spontaneous responses are used to illustrate and analyse their engagement, and how this was facilitated by artists. Most significantly, the paper presents '*visible rhythms*' as a new phenomenon or 'signs' of creative engagement. Through a facilitation of curiosity and self-discovery over sustained periods of time, as part of an environment where power is shared, children's engagement was observed as they expressed themselves through their '*visible rhythms*'.

### **Keywords**

Gallery education, early years, arts-based learning, creative, engagement

### **Introduction and Background on Tate Liverpool**

With the aim of developing an early years and family programme at Tate Liverpool, the Early Years and Family Learning team at the gallery sought support from a university, a local nursery school and a children's centre in order to set up a series of workshops aimed at 2-4 year olds. These workshops aimed to explore how visual arts could be used as a provocation to develop children's creative engagement. Since August 2013, Tate Liverpool has worked closely with more than sixty children (aged 2-4) from both the nursery and the children's

centre who were invited to take part in a schedule of workshops over a two-year period. Thirty six (2 hour) workshops took place at Tate Liverpool and were followed up with a workshop at the children's own setting.

This paper focuses on the creative engagement of one group of twelve children from the children's centre, who participated in ten workshops with artists over a one-year period. The children were all aged 3-4 years and some were joined by their parents, who were also invited to take part in the project. At Tate Liverpool, creative agents or artist educators are responsible for facilitating the early years gallery workshops at the gallery and throughout this paper are referred to as artists. Different artists who facilitate workshops at Tate Liverpool are used to using artworks and are skilled in enabling a range of visitors to engage. Although not all have an understanding of early years learning, each was able to develop inviting activities and facilitate in a way that engaged children in playful ways through the use of provocations. Some of the artists were conscious of the underpinning pedagogy and others weren't. What was important was the engagement; either consciously or unconsciously. In this sense children are respected as capable learners and encouraged to explore openly. In the context of this paper, the focus is on what children's engagement looks like and how artists might facilitate this engagement. Most significantly, the paper presents '*visible rhythms*' as a new phenomenon or 'signs' of creative engagement.

### **Perceived tensions that can prevent engagement**

We were aware that the presence of children moving around artworks in the intimate gallery environment could serve to reinforce some traditional constraints and debates about the inclusion of very young children in contemporary art galleries. There were inherent tensions in encouraging a democratic, co-constructive and child-led approach in the gallery space; a place often perceived as being totally hands-off and laden with rules which are seemingly dedicated to the sole act of viewing, contemplating and conserving valuable works of art. Facilitating a child's source of intrigue could be perceived as problematic in a gallery space where the 'please do not touch' rule can appear to dominate. Young children's natural disposition to run, touch, play and explore created a heightened sense of tension and amplified the perception of risk in the unfamiliar gallery space with untouchable precious artworks. A suitable balance of approaches for engaging young children's interests and attention would be key (Falk and Dierking, 1992), along with careful planning by artists to increase the provision of suitable interaction, art-making and participatory activities around the gallery. In order to engage a younger audience, alongside the requirement for more open

thinking by galleries, there was also the need by the gallery to develop a critically reflective approach (McLeod, 2015).

Having briefly identified the potential tensions that can sometimes restrict children's engagement at Tate Liverpool, the focus of this paper is on identifying what young children's creative engagement looks like and how artists facilitate this process. As such, we identify our understanding of creative engagement in the context of child-led, participatory process.

### **Conceptualising creative engagement in the context of an art gallery**

In contrast to the outcome driven model of education dominant today (Dockett and Perry, 2009), developing positive dispositions to learning and qualities such as self-discovery, intuition, curiosity and confidence, involves engagement in more child-led, experiential, creative approaches to learning through open, participatory and democratic processes (Orlandi, 2015). Engagement in this sense, particularly within creative learning environments, is a sign of quality (Norling, Sandberg and Almqvist (2015). An emphasis on the 'process' of art making enables opportunities for young children to engage more in enjoyable sensory experiences. The intention of making an end product can be a significant part of the creative process but how children get there and the decisions they make along the way are what give the process of art the ability to engage at a deeper level, with opportunities for expanding thoughts and possibilities (Beetlestone, 1998; Craft, 2002; Jeffrey and Woods, 2009) including the social, physical and personal context (Falk and Dierking, 1992). For Pringle and DeWitt (2014), the context of an art gallery can do just this. The use of artistic provocations can provide opportunities that nourish children's engagement and expand their imaginations (ibid). This process is supported when adults allow children to be creative at their own pace, to stand back (Craft, 2009) and support 'self-directed' learning in a relaxed environment without 'strict time limits' (Mayesky, 2011). Cizek's notion is that creative engagement will unfold from art using a 'non-interventionist' approach without any support so that artistic development is allowed to unfold naturally. Interrupting children when they are art making can also be seen as a way of preventing children's artistic flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003), for example some children use private speech, humming, or progress into their own world of imaginary play during the creative process (Fortunati, 2006). Understanding when to support, interrupt, or extend the creative process requires sensitivity and awareness of each child. Further relevant literature is used to support the discussion of the findings.

This study draws on Shier's Pathways to Participation (2001) as its underpinning theoretical model to create a pedagogy of engagement. Here participation and engagement share the philosophic basis of children being involved in their own learning and a sharing of power with adults (Shier, 2001; Article 12 (UNCRC) 1989). In line with Article 12 of the UNCRC, engagement begins when adults take children's perspectives seriously and offer opportunities that are active rather than passive in processes that matter to them (Lancaster, 2003 and Clark, 2005). This procedure involves addressing power relations that are inherent in adult-child relationships (Rinaldi, 2006 and Lancaster, 2003) so that respectful and democratic communities, can be built with young children as part of learning (MacNaughton et al., 2007; MacNaughton, 2005).

In the context of this study, engagement is concerned with expressive signs of children's participation and how this process is facilitated by adults, through a sharing of responsibility and power (United Nations, 1989, Article 12 and Davies and Artaraz, 2009). Our study draws on an adapted version of Shier's (2001) five progressive participation levels, and included non-verbal expression, alongside listening and consultation, so that engagement can be seen in a more open and sensory way involving free expression alongside developing ideas and making decisions as follows:

#### Listening:

- (1) Children are listened to / noticed.
- (2) Children are supported in expressing themselves.

#### Consultation:

- (3) Children's views / expressions are taken into account.
- (4) Children are involved in developing their ideas / expressing themselves

#### Participation:

- (5) Children share some power and take responsibility for developing their ideas and are encouraged to express themselves.

These steps are crucial in building a creative pedagogical space that contributes to children's engagement, where they can express themselves, make independent choices, share responsibility and follow through their own independent ideas to make sense of their learning (Clark, 2005, 2004; Landsdown, 2005 and Nutbrown, 2011, Lancaster, 2003). In this way, "the hundred languages of children" and the recognition of the "multiplicity" of language is

key (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 193), so language is not just seen as verbal or spoken but as a means of expression. Here, active listening skills are required by the adult alongside an openness for welcoming difference as part of a safe environment. At the heart of such learning spaces, children are respected as individuals, and learning is supported through interaction with their peers and adults. In addition, there is an emphasis on constructive thought and communication rather than on the transmission of knowledge and skills (Villen, 1993 and Malaguzzi, 1992). Such approaches are based on responsive learning contexts and reciprocal interaction (Bath, 2009) and were central to our research.

### ***Background to the workshops and children's responses***

The artwork collections used as provocations at Tate Liverpool for the workshops are contemporary and open-ended, allowing for multiple interpretations. New meaning can be generated independently by the viewer and also in a more collaborative way with others. The creative workshops offered by artists at Tate Liverpool provided opportunities for each artist to use their own unique skills, artistic practice and knowledge to plan each hour long session. Artists began by selecting an artwork from the Tate's collection as a starting point which provided a stimulus or provocation for promoting children's thinking, for making links between concepts and materials and for inspiring art-making opportunities and experiences. Open ended objects such as strips of different coloured paper, boxes, mirrored card, view finders, rainbow reflector glasses, wooden blocks, wooden sticks, balloons, string and pieces of fabric were strategically placed to encourage movement and involve the children in expressing themselves as they explored the gallery space. As visitors to the gallery are not allowed to touch the art on display, this was particularly important. The artists invited the children to visually and kinaesthetically respond to the artworks through the exploration of colour, light, sound, movement, materials and shape. The materials were placed directly in front of an artwork and were then used freely by the children to make sense of their own interpretations of the art. For example, some children chose to wrap themselves in fabric and became a sculpture. Other children explored structure and shape by using mirrored card in front of an artwork. This participatory, open approach allowed for relationships to develop and an ethical child centred approach to be developed (Lahman, 2008). Collaborative co-construction of knowledge individually, between the children, and the children and artists, were observed during which children's responses, through their own creative expressions, highly regarded and somewhat amplified by the contrasting intimacy of the gallery space. During each session the children's centre staff, parents and university tutors were encouraged to join in. Sessions at the gallery were followed with repeated visits to the children's own

nursery settings, where children's earlier creative engagement in art making could be further explored and developed. Access to such pieces of art to a certain extent, make the workshops at Tate Liverpool a unique experience for the children.

Naturalistic observations were used. Observing children's engagement was in effect noticing what was happening at a given time, with heightened sensitivity to notice things that might otherwise be missed (Mason, 2002). The naturalistic observations were of the children, with an intrapersonal focus (Rogoff, 2003) and how this was encouraged. However, their immediate environment being in a gallery space and how they related to this was significant as a focus. Each of these areas was observed, and written notes were made of everything seen and heard during the observations. Naturalistic observations provided time for the observer to notice what was happening, and make notes of peripheral activity that could possibly support understanding children's engagement and the facilitation of this during reflection at a later time (Mason, 2002).

The initial analysis of the data was driven by the observations of the children, and coding at this stage was determined by what was of significance in terms of their engagement and how this was facilitated. This was a very lengthy process as the observation records were examined several times for common themes and for interlinking themes. Determining the labels of codes to identify themes was difficult, and identifying the connections was complex, but worthwhile in that highlighting underlying patterns is for getting to the heart of what is going on (David and Sutton, 2004). To make the large quantity of data from the observations manageable, the initial research questions were used as applicable to all the data. These were as follows:

- signs of children's creative engagement
- how artists facilitated young children's creative engagement

Once this basic coding framework had been established, it was necessary to examine the evidence available from the observations of the children and to include the context of the Tate in that examination. This was the most challenging and time-consuming stage as judgements had to be made not about what was significant to us, but about what the 'signs revealed about the children's engagement. As Orlandi (2014:301) identifies, 'what was of significance to one child might not have been to another'. The context of the Tate as a space for engagement was clearly very significant, for example, a child looking around could have represented a sense of awe and wonder, but equally it might have indicated feelings of nervousness. Having time to develop meaningful, trusting relationships was important in being able to analyse the



observations and the signs of engagement truthfully. However, it is important to acknowledge the influence of our own experiences of childhood when interpreting an understanding of the children's engagement (Lahman, 2008). There is a risk of the content being interpreted or misrepresented in a way that is influenced by the values of 'others'. While a particular weakness of the research could be identified in not interviewing the children, the focus was on looking for deeper 'signs' provided naturally by the children rather than interviewing them. Rather than exposing limitations of their language in expressing their engagement, the research takes a deeper pedagogical approach. As Leitch (2006, p. 551) acknowledges, 'many emotional, sensory and embodied dimensions of experience lie below the threshold of consciousnesses and are thus impossible to articulate in words'. Rather than relying on interviews with children we wanted to understand what deeper engagement looked like and how the children expressed themselves (Leitch 2006). Their expressive chosen visual interpretations of the artwork are taken as an 'open' indication of engagement. Once the key signs from the observations of engagement and facilitation had been identified, they were compared with the literature review key signs of engagement and its facilitation and used to create Figure 1 and Figure 2, based loosely on Orlandi's (2014) 'barometer of significance'. Both Figures were developed and used as guides to aid initial analysis of the naturalistic observations. It is important to note that the individual signs are not intended as rigid, developmental or as a measure of engagement, as each indicator cannot be considered independently. Rather they are intended as a tool to aid reflection on engagement, and are suggestions for consideration, and should be used in relation to the context.

Figure 1, shows the 'key signs of engagement', and identifies commonly occurring aspects of engagement from the observations of the children and supporting literature.

Figure 1: Key indicators of engagement

Quality of Engagement	Nature of Engagement	Some evidence	Strong evidence
	Exploration		
	Curiosity / intuition / spontaneity		
	Concentration		
	Self-confidence,		
	Personal interpretation / self- discovery		
	Making connections		
	Making sense of situations / follow ideas through		
	Possibility thinking		
	Risk taking / 'no right or wrong'		
	Expression of feelings and thoughts		

Figure 2, shows ‘how engagement can be facilitated. Again these signs are drawn from the observations of the children and supporting literature.

Figure 2: Indicators about how engagement can be facilitated

Quality of Facilitation	Nature of Facilitation	Some evidence	Strong evidence
	Provide a variety of ‘open’ sensory experiences		
	Relaxed environment for self expression is valued		
	Encourage children to make decisions		
	An understanding how to share power		
	Collaborative, sharing of ideas		
	Learning together		
	Respond to children’s interests		
	Recognise the ‘multiplicity of language’ as expression.		
	Encourage children to be creative at their own pace		
	Space and time are valued.		
	A welcoming of difference		
	Sensitive engagement		
	Encourage possibility thinking		
	Adult is self-aware and critically reflective		

The period of a year was significant in allowing relationships to develop between the artists and the children, and for a safe trusting environment to be created (Lahman, 2008). It was important to allow time to simply be there with the children and see, hear and notice naturally occurring signs of engagement, which minimised potential disruptions to the children’s experiences (Wolcott, 1995).

**Discussion**

Vignettes have been selected to demonstrate the findings of the research questions, namely:

1. signs of children’s creative engagement using art work as a provocation
2. how artists facilitated young children’s creative engagement at Tate Liverpool

Vignettes are descriptions of ‘live’ learning situations that bring content and pedagogy together to capture the essence of learning and teaching. In doing so they can help make sense of specific educational issues related to learning and teaching (Veal, 2002). In this paper each vignette provides an insight into the structure of each unique workshop, and how the artists in

question responded to the children's ideas. Here the gallery space is significant in terms of the children's engagement. They were made aware of the need to remember that other people were visiting the gallery at the start of each workshop. The vast open space is respectfully quiet, yet allows the children to express themselves freely and naturally. Because of the open, respectful relationships that developed over the year as part of engaging approaches, they felt comfortable sharing a space with the artists and working collaboratively to express their engagement or '*visible rhythms*' as we came to refer to them.

The following three vignettes have been selected as there was strong evidence of all of the engagement signs from Figure 1 and 2. Each vignette is followed by an analysis of the responses of engagement observed and how the artists facilitated young children's creative engagement. In doing so, literature is used to support the discussion. The chapter ends with an overall summary of the findings in relation to each research question.

As part of this analysis, the term '*visible rhythm*' is a new phenomenon, used to describe the naturally occurring repeated patterns of engagement that were observed and supported through facilitation from one activity to another, which resulted in an expressive physical engagement. Pseudonyms are used throughout the account.

### ***Vignette 1: Emily and the toy surprises***

As part of a visit to the Tate, a group of children aged 3-4 are invited into a small room to the side of the main exhibition area. As they enter the room, they sit with the accompanying adults (practitioners and parents) in a large circle around an interactive moving sculpture (with orange circles and orange and white stripes) called Ensemble of Eleven Toy Surprises from the 'Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making' exhibition. The artist has chosen the sculpture as a provocation for learning and invites the children to share their thoughts about the sculpture and how it moves. Words suggested by the children include, 'jiggly,' 'jumping' 'spinning' and 'turning'. At this point Emily has not said anything but was keen to sit with her mother as part of the circle. She watches and listens intently.

After several minutes of responding to the children's comments and descriptions, the artist invites the children into the exhibition where they are encouraged to find an artwork or sculpture that they like. The group of children, supported and guided by adults begin to move slowly around the gallery in search of something that appeals to them. Emily's mother holds hands with her three year old daughter, as they move around the gallery space looking and pointing at various objects together. Emily's mother points at various artworks and asks,

‘What about that one?’ Emily looks, shakes her head and continues to move around the gallery space until she notices the sculpture with orange circles and orange and white stripes. She points to it and runs towards it. The interactive sculpture becomes animated when buttons are pressed. The artist encourages children to take turns in pressing the buttons and in doing so uses the words suggested previously by the children to describe the sculpture. Emily carefully observes each child as she waits for a turn. She moves a switch; the sculpture rattles and she turns towards her mother for a look of approval. The mother instantly claps and responds with loud enthusiastic, ‘Yeah, you do it!’ Emily tentatively turns the switch. The second time she is more confident, and poises and waits for the ‘surprise’. She spends several moments absorbed turning the switch herself at her own pace and watching the surprise repeatedly spinning and turning. The artist notices Emily’s absorbed interest and uses the words suggested by the children, to ‘become’ a ‘noisy living sculpture’ in the gallery space. Emily smiles and begins to spin in circles with her arms outstretched. Her enjoyment is visible as she continues round and round, to the sound of laughter from the other children and adults (who are now also spinning in circles in their own way).

Emily has clearly responded to the sculpture as a provocation and displays a desire to explore for herself (Csikszentmihayli (1979). At the heart of this process, is a curiosity linked to an intense awareness of feelings and thoughts and a desire to explore, all of which are essential in developing concentration and an intrinsic source of motivation. Csikszentmihayli, (1979). Furthermore ‘there is an openness to (relevant) stimuli, a perceptual and cognitive functioning; an intensity which can be lacking in other kinds of activity’ (Laevers, 2000, p. 23). Emily’s curiosity leads to possibility thinking (Craft, 2009) and self-confidence in expressing herself visually (Laevers, 2000). She is respected and supported through constructive thought and communication rather than on the transmission of knowledge (McLeod, 2015, Villen, 1993 and Malaguzzi, 1992).

The relaxed environment where power is shared (Rinaldi (2006), enables Emily to take risks without fear of failure (Carr, 2000) and express patterns of repeated behaviour through her natural schema for learning (Nutbrown, 2011 and Athey, 2007).

Here Emily is an active participant in her learning (Lancaster, 2003; Clark, 2005) as part of a respectful and democratic environment (MacNaughton et al, 2007).

This is seen in her concentration and repeated desire to find a sculpture, press the button and then to express herself in the form of a connected ‘visible rhythm’. Emily’s private speech (Fortunati, 2006) becomes visible through the opportunity to engage in a process of making

connections involving watching, trialling, inner speech, a collaborative sharing of ideas, and finally having the confidence to express her personal interpretation visibly. She was clearly supported by the artist as part of the relaxed environment who displayed the ability to share power and respond sensitively to Emily's interests and her non verbal communication (Rinaldi, 2006; Nutbrown, 2011 and Athey, 2007) without rushing her. Here, the idea of communication as 'the hundred languages of children' or the 'multiplicity of language' (Rinaldi, 2006, p: 193) is important so non-verbal communication is valued. Emily's attendance at each of the Tate sessions over the year, accompanied by her mother, father and younger brother, are also significant in developing her confidence and expanding Emily's ideas and possibility thinking through art making, selecting resources independently and expressing herself imaginatively.

### ***Vignette 2: Oliver exploring pastels***

This case study traces the engagement of one child, Oliver, during a follow up visit by an artist to the children's centre setting. The children had visited the Turner Monet Twombly exhibition at the gallery two weeks earlier, which was accompanied by a journey on a river boat to encourage sensory links between the art work and the whole experience. On this visit the artist took some time to carefully prepare the hall space in order to offer a variety of open ended and multi-sensory materials, which included clay for children to choose in addition to large expanses of paper taped to the floor, with a selection of different coloured pastels and chalks strategically placed around the paper. These were especially selected to visually and kinaesthetically link with Monet's watery, windy world and Turners 'fire over water' themes.

Oliver finds a space on the alongside the prepared paper. He selects a dark blue soft pastel, holds it fully in his hand and begins to draw, pressing hard on the paper making thick circular marks and lines. He looks briefly across to the artist as she smudges and blends her own marks and he begins, rubbing the pastel into the paper with his free hand. He continues for more than twenty minutes, his face near to the paper, deeply absorbed in concentration as he repeatedly draws, rubs and smudges the chalk. There is no verbal language, but both the artist and Oliver communicate using the occasional glances and smiles. As the artist draws alongside Oliver she begins to add a vocabulary, suggesting single words such as '*swirl*' and '*twirl*' as she draws rhythmically on the paper. Oliver continues to make marks quietly and confidently, creating his own interpretations and connections alongside the artist. His bold circular marks become more pronounced as he pauses only to press or stamp the pastel hard onto the paper. Oliver looks carefully and closely as he uses the pastel to make a dotty

pattern, leaving loose chalk on the paper for further smudging and exploring and finding new ways of using the pastels. Without any verbal communication, an open collaboration is established between Oliver and the artist. The term 'visible rhythm' is a new phrase that we came to use for describing the naturally occurring repeated patterns of behaviour that were observed on so many occasions as part of the workshops.

Oliver's earnest response to the art making process is observed by his deep concentration and engagement over a sustained period of time (Cziksentmihalyi, 2003, Laevers, 2000). His spontaneous thought and engagement is represented through his exploration, self-discovery, interpretation (Craft, 2009, Edlington, 2003) and self-confidence (Dockett and Perry, 2009). Oliver's interest in drawing in circles for a sustained period is extended by the artists' presence (Shier, 2001; Rinaldi, 2006; Laevers, 2007). Her sensitive responses encourage Oliver's active involvement and interest (Anning and Ring 2004). There is a welcoming of difference (Rinaldi, 2006) in the relaxed environment she provides and she is aware of how to share power so that Oliver makes decisions and follows through with his own ideas. An open, non-verbal narrative is created as she draws alongside Oliver and in doing so there is a sharing of ideas and a welcoming of difference at his own pace. As the artist responds to his interest in drawing She acknowledges and knows when and how to be near, to offer space or to challenge, in a sensitive and supportive way, which as Warden, (2007) acknowledges is particularly challenging for adults. In doing so, Oliver's new mark making possibilities flow as a result (Nutbrown, 2011; Athey, 1992). A respectful relationship is evidenced through the sensitive engagement (Rinaldi, 2006; Laevers, 2005) so learning occurs as part of non verbal collaborative sharing of ideas with the artist as a co-learner, rather than an infallible expert (Pringle, 2002). This demonstrates a sensitive understanding of knowing when and how to support the process of engagement (Warden, 2007); through sharing power (Rinaldi, 2006), recognising the 'multiplicity of language' (Malaguzzi, 1993) and Rinaldi, 2006 and creating the right atmosphere where space, time and choice are offered (Warden 2007) (Craft, 1999; Nutbrown, 2011, and Warden 2007). In doing so, the artist embraces a reciprocal respectfulness and appreciation of the child's ideas (Shier. 2001; Lancaster, 2003, Mayall, 2000).

Oliver's self-motivated state of deep engagement, is seen by his desire to repeat an enjoyable experience and become completely involved in the drawing activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). This 'deep level learning' is enhanced further through choice and his desire to explore, be curious, intuitive, and express himself (Laevers, 2007). Through the process of making and experiencing an artwork, in a relaxed atmosphere where sufficient time and space was offered

for experimenting and indulging in different techniques of expressive self-discovery (Mayesky, 2011) Oliver's own pattern of movement, or 'visible rhythm' is observed. Vecchi (2010) likens this visible rhythm to watching a 'dance' where children make meaningful connections between what they know, what they can do and what they understand; so new learning is nurtured using appropriate time, space and adult engagement (Rinaldi, 2006; Warden 2007).

### ***Vignette 3: Jack and the mirror cubes***

This vignette is based around a brief episode from one visit by the group of children to Tate Liverpool. The artist has selected the Robert Morris (untitled) mirror cube installation from the DLA Piper Series: Constellations exhibition as a provocation for children's learning. This choice of artwork comes from the artist's interest and practice in creating installations that enable children to explore light, shadow, reflection, scale, space, materials and movement. The artist invites the children into the gallery space where she has provided reflective mirror cards and pencils on a long piece of paper for the group of twelve children to select if they choose to.

Some children begin to sit, lie and crawl around the floor, whilst others begin to talk about what, or who, they see in the mirrors. One child, Jack stands up and begins to side-step along a long piece of paper, he pulls faces that represent his movements, as he slowly moves his arms in a wave like fashion. As he moves he watches his many reflections carefully in the mirrors. Jack is lost in creating a dance like movement, what appears as a rhythm; clearly visible to the onlooker.

The steady rhythm continues for several minutes while Jack begins to move through the installation, peacefully exploring his reflection and gently waving his arms. All the time he is engaged in watching his own reflection in a relaxed and carefree manner. He is careful not to touch the mirrors but when he does the adults gently remind him to, 'try not to touch'. After twenty minutes the children are invited to a studio space in Tate Liverpool, where black and white paint, long rolls of paper and lengthy strips of acetate have been laid out on the floor ready for expressive mark-making. Jack is keen to continue his physical movements in a 'visual rhythm' as he repeats his careful dance, tip-toeing back and forth over a long stretched-out piece of narrow acetate. Later on, the lights are turned down and the children's acetate that was created by the other children, is projected onto different surfaces together with Japanese style music. Jack continues to spin, adding movements to his rhythmic dance,

whilst maintaining a flowing motion with his arms; all the time fascinated by the shadows he was creating as a result of the changed lighting.

In the above vignette, Jack's repeated patterns and creative physical engagement movements (Laevers, 2000) are nourished by the choice of an appropriate provocation and content (Pringle and DeWitt, 2014). Jack's natural patterns of thinking and engagement can be recognised through observation of his 'visible rhythm' evidenced throughout the workshop. His expressive and intuitive response to stimuli was displayed through a persistence for moving 'up and down' in a straight line (Nutbrow, 2011) and a concentration and enjoyment of watching his own movements in the reflection of the mirror cube (Lancaster, 2003, and Rinaldi 2006) enabled him to make connections and try out new possibilities. Central to the effectiveness of supporting Jack's learning is the ability of the artist to function as a co-learner, rather than an infallible expert so he is encouraged to experiment within the supportive environment in a co-constructed way (Pringle, 2002). Jack's non-verbal yet physically expressive movements were recognised and valued by the artist (Rinaldi, 2006) throughout his visit to the gallery. It is clear that this is his preferred way of moving, as an 'intentional and communicative practice' (Hackett, 2012:48). In this way the artist is learning from Jack as he demonstrates different ways of expressing himself other than walking and running. As he chooses to move about the gallery using an expressive dance like form; waving his arms, shuffling and sliding, freedom and choice is facilitated by the artist (Lancaster, 2003; Mayall, 2000). Such ways were frequently observed and considered as his multi-modal preferences of expression; signs of how he often felt relaxed in the gallery environment (Warden, 2007). Right from the start there is a self-awareness by the artist that enables an openness and welcoming of difference (McLeod, 2015 and Rinaldi, 2006) as Jack's multiplicity of language is recognised and valued as engagement. Here a critically reflective approach is clearly evident as an essential ingredient in facilitating meaningful engagement for Jack.

## **Endpoints**

The most significant finding as part of the children's engagement (and the research as a whole) was the evidencing of 'visible rhythms' as we called them. We consider this a new phenomenon in that signs of engagement (in Figure 1) are transferred through facilitation from one activity to another, resulting in an expressive physical engagement. For Emily, her private speech (Fortunati, 2006) became visible through the opportunity to engage in a process of making connections with pressing buttons, which resulted in the confidence to express herself visibly. Oliver's visible rhythms developed as repeated patterns over a period



of time from one workshop to another. For Jack, his engagement as a visible rhythm was facilitated and supported from the start of a workshop. All of the children were keen to explore ways of making connections and joining their ideas and thoughts together to make sense of their experience. Each case study provides evidence of the children drawing on their own intuition, curiosity and self-confidence so they made sense of their experience at their own pace as part of a carefully prepared open provocation, in a relaxed environment, promoted through sensitive engagement and the sharing of ideas (Laevers, 2007; Arnold, 1999 and Nutbrown 2011).

Without the facilitation described, it is questionable whether 'engagement demonstrated through 'visible rhythms' would have been possible. The sensitive, collaborative co-construction of ideas through a sharing of power, used by each of the artists was key to the facilitation of visible rhythms. All three vignettes present the ability of artists to tap into children's natural patterns of thinking (Athey, 1990). The children remained engaged when the provocation acted as an opportunity to demonstrate physical engagement (Pringle and DeWitt, 2014) as part of a relaxed, trusting atmosphere where time and space was offered over sustained periods of time.

What is also significant about the facilitation of children's creative engagement is that each of the signs as part of Figure 2 are associated with underpinning values and a holistic understanding and awareness of the purpose of education as a process (McLeod, 2015, Orlandi, 2014). Such an approach for engagement requires a critically reflective approach of openness and self-awareness (McLeod, 2015).

In terms of what has been learned about facilitating young children's creative engagement at Tate Liverpool and the signs involved, gallery education for under fives can offer an effective and highly imaginative approach to nurturing children's creative engagement through their 'visible rhythms'. It is a way of thinking and doing differently (Vecci, 2010) and as such, is a way of learning that Tate Liverpool are keen to promote.

What is also unique to this study is the unusual space at Tate Liverpool that was a significant factor in facilitating young children's creative engagement. This was a new and unfamiliar space initially to all of the children and as such could have been quite intimidating and daunting particularly given the expectations of other people visiting the gallery at the same time as the workshops were taking place. Yet because of the nature of the project that took place over a year and the open, reciprocal relationships between the children and the artists

that were key in creating a relaxed environment, the gallery space provided unique opportunities for the children to feel comfortable expressing their visible rhythms freely and naturally.

For creative engagement, the adult's role is crucial. Contemporary artworks can be used by artists as successful provocations for stimulating young children's engagement and 'visible rhythms' when facilitation occurs through an open and responsive process. The importance of developing respectful, reciprocal relationships between adults (artists, practitioners and parents) and children was key for encouraging curiosity and self-discovery throughout the project, where the adults' role in engaging and developing children's aesthetic responses to works of art was considered as being essential. Creating the right conditions for learning where power is shared and children are listened to and engaged in participatory approaches was central to achieving a democratic approach for successful creative engagement. Recognising the skill and ability of the artists in facilitating young children in this way is key in promoting future programmes for promoting creative engagement.

Understanding how to share power and finding the right balance for supporting creative engagement may be challenging for adults, it may be uncomfortable, or present risks and tensions. Adults often have different ideas around what art is, or should be, they may also hold different views on supporting or facilitating children's engagement. It is, therefore, essential for adults to adopt a critically reflective approach (McLeod, 2015) and a shared appreciation of what engagement is, through an open dialogue and sensitive exchange of opinions. Knowing how and when to respond, model, extend, stand-back or interrupt is significant for motivating and engaging children's involvement in creative thinking and learning.

Finally, the repeated visits with children over a long period of time were significant in creating an environment that allowed time and space for children to experiment with creative processes that promoted deep level engagement. Such workshops remain an underused pedagogy and further research is necessary in order to locate a discussion on ways of promoting visits to galleries in supporting children's engagement as part of their on-going learning. As such this paper recommends that local policy makers (Tate and Local Authorities) and national policy makers (Government) promote the value of arts based gallery education in this way.

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