



CASE STUDY

Elements: Supporting creativity in Early Years settings across Somerset

Setting: Stoberry Park Primary

Type: Foundation Stage in primary school

Lead Class teacher name: Veronica Ballard

Artist name: Howard Vause

Artform: Digital Art (Video)

Term date: Spring Term 1

Average number of children and age: 31 Children all 4 or 5 years old (Taken in groups of 6 children at a time.)

Average number of adults and type: 1 EY practitioner from setting shadowing artist

Research question: How can we develop children's and adult's creativity through technology?

Activity:

We are a large Reception class (31 children) in a one and a half form entry primary school. The children have been in school for a term and learn through Quests. The children had shown a great deal of interest in Julia Donaldson books during our book week in the Autumn term. We therefore chose the next quest to be 'There's no such thing as a Gruffalo ... or is there?' Through this quest the staff hoped to lead the children through an exciting investigation in to what is real and what is not real, whilst exploring emotions such as feeling scared, frightened, nervous etc.

Although the teachers are used to using computers and ipads with the children, the adults didn't feel very confident to introduce a range of technology to the children due to their own lack of experience and expertise. The opportunity to work with a film-maker seemed too good an opportunity to miss as a means to develop both the children's and adults confidence with using technology as a tool for creative work and expression.

Having discussed with Howard previously our intended quest about *The Gruffalo*, we arranged for him to come in right at the beginning when the children first discover a strange trail leading from their classroom door to the outside area.



Howard introduced the children to the handheld cameras and taught the children how to film using a steady arm. Most of the children knew what a 'Movie' was but couldn't say how one was made. One child commented "My Daddy sometimes films me using his phone. (Pointing to Howard's camera) Is that a phone?" Howard explained that it is a handheld camera and modeled how to use it, as well as the role of the tripod.

At this point one of the children noticed a toy squirrel sitting outside the classroom and a trail leading outside. The children became instantly intrigued and got up to investigate. Howard gave a few children the handheld cameras to video what was happening. The children excitedly followed the trail discovering characters from the *Gruffalo* along the way.

Howard introduced some of the children to using the tripod to film their friends and explained why sometimes the tripod is useful for creating a more steady film.

Development:

Once the children had returned to class still buzzing with the excitement of finding the *Gruffalo*, Howard and I questioned the children about how they thought the *Gruffalo* characters had got there and one child's reply was "Well, I saw them on my telly over Christmas and I think they jumped out of the TV to see what we do at school!" Several other children seemed to agree with this explanation, which led to Howard inviting



them to create their own movies about the Gruffalo and themselves. The children were very excited at this idea.

Artist Viewpoint:

At the start of each session, the whole class watched the film we had produced in the previous session. In session 1 we saw the handycam footage – first at normal speed, then we tried playing it backwards, sped up, slowed down etc. - which the children REALLY enjoyed!



We followed screenings with a class discussion usually about the film they had just seen. What had they enjoyed? What had surprised them? Made them laugh? Had they learned anything about filmmaking? What is editing? Special effects? Why use a green screen? What had really been filmed and what had been added or "edited" into the film later?

Sharing the film like this with everyone seemed to bring the children together within the project. The audience was eager to celebrate the work of their classmates and the concept of filmmaking and its possibilities

became increasingly embedded.

Conclusion:

Both the Artist (Howard) and the Teacher (Veronica) felt that the project was mutually beneficial in terms of addressing professional development needs. Veronica who generally feels at odds with technology has been given an insight into how even simple technology can enhance young children's learning throughout the EYFS Curriculum. The work Howard undertook with the children covered the following areas of learning: PSED (SC&SA, F&B), CLL (L&A, U, S), UTW (T), EA&D(BI), and many of the Characteristics of Learning. The children truly found their experiences to be 'magical', thoroughly enjoying the processes of learning how to use the handheld cameras, tripod, headphones and microphone. They learnt what the term 'Editing' means and often repeated it back to Howard during whole class sessions when watching each others films. "Howard takes what we do and takes some bits out - do you remember? Then ... he puts new bits in that we never knew about. That's the editing bit!"

The children loved reviewing each others films, laughing raucously whenever the film speeded up, slowed down, went backwards or (through the magic of green

screen) the children started to fly, disappear as part of a magic trick, swim under the water (sometimes with a fishes tail!) These experiences enabled the children to explore their emotions and use their actions to recreate imagined situations such as being robots, zombies, magicians, power rangers and fish. Because the children knew that their actions were being caught on camera they often became more extrovert than they might otherwise have been.

Although, as a teacher, I would not be able to recreate the Green Screen experience again, the whole experience has given me an insight in to what a key role technology has to play within an Early Years classroom. It has given me the confidence to use the technology we already have in school and use it to it's full capacity as a means to support and enhance the children's education in all of the areas of learning. The children are now using the handheld cameras independently to film each other during their continuous provision activities. It is a wonderful insight as a teacher to capture the children's experiences without being right there next to them. Fabulous role - play, language and social interactions have been captured.

We have already shared the children's films with their parents who were amazed at just how much the children had managed to achieve within such a short space of time. One parent commented "What a rich learning experience you have provided for our children. This is something they will never forget and I don't think they will be able to watch a film again without thinking back to their own film making experience. Thank you for doing something I'm sure most 4 and 5 Year olds would never have the chance to do."



I intend to share the films with the rest of the school children and Staff next so that the children are able to gain an insight in to how Green screen might feature in some of their favourite films and may then aspire to make their own films. I will disseminate my own experience to the rest of the staff, hopefully inspiring them to embrace technology within their own classrooms. I can't thank Howard and the Take Art team enough for providing myself, the staff in EYFS and the children a learning experience we will never forget and will fully embrace as part of our future work.

One of the films produced can be viewed here:-
<https://vimeo.com/200911656/200107a1e7>

Planning information for sessions

Working with a group of 5-7 children, the workspace was draped with a large sheet of emerald green fabric creating quite a dynamic environment.

We sat together in a circle on the floor to unpack the sturdy tripod. The children would work together to set up the tripod evenly – requiring time and co-operation. They would guess at the purpose of the tripod and why it might be useful.

Next we unpack the camera, microphone and headphones. In contrast, this delicate equipment requires careful handling. We power-up the equipment and take turns to film each other, making sure the sound is being captured by the microphone and relayed to the headphones. The children are captivated by their image in the camera's viewfinder/monitor and by the sensitivity of the microphone.

Having experimented with the equipment it was now time to make a film! We film everything in front of the big green-screen. Most children in front of the camera but they take turns to operate the camera which is now mounted on the tripod. They also monitor sound through the headphones.

A theme or idea is offered to the children and supported by a prop or piece of music. When it looks like one theme has run its course, we move on to the next. Filmmaking becomes play.

Themes varied from session to session and were often spontaneous. Each session featured 6-7 themes. These variations are described below:

SESSION 1

Began by talking about films, stories, emotions, feelings and our favorite things.

Telling the Gruffalo story;

Dance and movement to scary music;

The difference between "scared" and "scary",

SESSION 2

The children love to see themselves and each other on the screen. Each video includes technical tricks, which I'd like the children to become familiar with. I'd love us to play more with creating illusions and impossible scenes. Perhaps try some sound effects and the children can "fly" or "be at the bottom of the sea", disappear or be sawn-in-half in a magic trick... next week. It would be fun to have a couple of [child-size green morph suits](#) to help with the magic.

SESSION 3

Showed "HOW TO USE A DIGITAL VIDEO CAMERA (short animated film I made in 2007) to class to help with handycam technique. When asked what they'd learned, the children said to keep the camera steady by using a tripod!

Each new group of children begin to copy their responses to provocations from what they observed children doing in the film of the previous week's session - provocations become familiar by proxy.

SESSION 4

Themes: Magic Show - visual tricks - camera tricks – illusions - The Gruffalo story
The children were invited to think of a piece of magic which they'd like to perform.
Then we worked out how we could film it.

Having seen each of the films from earlier sessions, the children's conceptual understanding of Green Screen (that it can be made to disappear in the film - so that ANY background can later be added) has increased.

Extra time was spent in post-production to achieve a fairly high quality look to this short film.

SESSION 5

Theme: Environments "Where are we?" - Scale - "Special Effects" - Fantastic Super Powers

- think of a *special power* you'd like to have. Their choices included being able to breathe underwater, being able to fly and the ability to stretch and to become any size.

It is clear that with a little more filmmaking experience, many of the children could soon be able to create films with linked scenes and flowing narratives and be able to "Direct" their peers.