



***Exploramentation!:* Spotting Authentic Engagement in Creative Activity among Students with Severe and Complex Learning Needs (December 2006–April 2007)**

**Background**

As there is an existing programme of creative arts activities at Sunfield, the researchers were interested to explore the depth and quality of creative experience that this offered. The focus of the projects within the programme to date has been to create opportunities for students to be involved in a creative process. When evaluating the projects, the researchers needed to know whether the students had been able to access the opportunity, and whether they had had the chance to be creative. This raised questions: how do we know when the students are being creative; what are the indicators; is it possible to identify different levels of engagement? It was envisaged that specific findings might lead to refining or adapting the way creative projects were designed and facilitated.

**Aims of this project:**

- To identify when students with complex needs are truly engaged in a creative process
- To identify ways of working which support a student's involvement in exploring and experimenting within a creative process.

## The Intervention

The project involved four students from Key Stages 2 (7–11 years), 3 (11–14 years) and the Further Education department (aged 16 years and above). The practical workshops were based on the notion of a series of creative provocations through visual art, and the content of each session stemmed from the student's reactions and interests. Hence, the content organically emerged as the project developed. This student-centred approach was loosely based on a combination of the Reggio Emilia ethos and Intensive Interaction. It was felt that we were most likely to see exploration and experimentation within sessions if students were invited to respond within an environment that held many creative possibilities, and were supported by an adult practitioner.

Data was collected from: real time observation; video documentation of practical sessions; recorded levels of engagement; practitioners' reflection sessions; peer group discussions; discussions with teaching staff; and photographic documentation sessions. A scale of engagement was devised



that measured the extent to which a student was involved in an activity. It described three key indicators shown by a student when experiencing levels of authentic engagement. The scale was adapted throughout the project as the criteria of the different levels of engagement and their recognition were explored.

## Main Findings

- There were different levels of engagement that appeared to correspond with stages of exploration and experimentation in a creative process
- Before these stages of exploration and experimentation, there was also a level that was purely about experiencing. Some students did not move beyond the 'experiencing' stage.



- When fully engaged, students initiated and led activities; at this point, the practitioner was rarely required to participate, or, if they were, the student made it clear how and where they wanted them to be involved. The student had full ownership of the creative activity in these instances.



This information was compiled by: Peppy Hills – Director of Creative Arts.

A full report is available on request