

## Project case study - Carmarthenshire (2007-8)

### Partners

School: Richmond Park Primary, Carmarthen (nursery and reception groups)

Gallery: Oriol Myrddin, Carmarthen (exhibiting large paintings by Gareth Hugh Davies)

Artist: Helen Astley (ceramicist)

### Project aims

- To develop the creative and visual arts skills of young children
- To explore how involvement in creative, art activities with artists and galleries could improve self esteem, confidence and language development – particularly children's descriptive vocabularies
- To develop the creative skills of early years teaching and ancillary staff and explore how creativity could be integrated within a cross-curricular project
- To enable artists and galleries to develop confidence in ways of working with young children in both the gallery and school setting
- To document good practice to disseminate to other settings
- To further the links between Carmarthenshire's early years department and a local gallery resource

### Project summary

Inspired by Gareth Hugh Davies' work, the project focused on the theme of tracks, trails and shadows. Sessions in school before visiting the gallery gave children confidence in responding to the paintings. Activity ideas then emerged from the children's responses. Mark-making led into three-dimensional work, on a large and small scale, outdoors and inside. On a second visit to the same exhibition, children responses were clearly heightened by their own creative experiences. To capture evidence of outcomes, early years staff and artist took photographs, noted comments and recorded discussions.





### Outcomes

The project offered learning opportunities across all aspects of the Foundation Phase curriculum. Staff observed the impact on children from their special needs assessment unit, and saw very positive outcomes.

*'I saw B gradually become more engaged and less withdrawn, using occasional words where before there'd been no verbal communication. On the second gallery visit, B joined in with the activity and paired up with L. This was the first time I'd seen him laugh and really express his pleasure.'*



For all children, there were valuable personal and social outcomes.

*'Throughout the project the children had to work together, share things, help each other, take turns.'*



Children's personal and social development linked with their knowledge and understanding of the world.

*'I was a bit concerned that children might be scared by darkness of the pictures. However, the children visited the darkroom at the school beforehand and talked about the dark. I think this helped them relate the exhibition at different levels.'*

Rich and confident language use was noted, particularly during gallery visits.

*'The lights say it's home time.'*



Creative development a key outcome. Pupils explored new materials and processes and were able to develop ideas in their own ways.

The project gave early years practitioners new ideas and understanding.

*'I feel more confident about understanding how for a child the progress of a piece of art is as important as completing it.... and about the idea of working with outside agencies to gain new idea and expertise.'*

For the gallery education officer, the project was also an important training opportunity.

*'I have a better understanding now of what early years education is all about as well as how to cater for children with special needs.'*

For the artist, the project had offered valuable professional development. The Reggio Emilia philosophy and framework had provided a particular inspiration.

### **Learning from the project**

A wealth of ideas about working successfully with young children around gallery visits and art works was generated by the project. Findings from across the projects are collated in the *engage in the foundation phase toolkit*.