

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

### Partners

School: Acton Park Infants, Wrexham (reception class)

Gallery: Wrexham Library and Arts Centre (exhibiting contemporary artists' books)

Artist: Chris Bird-Jones (sculptural / architectural glass)

### Project aims

- To explore the impact of working with galleries and artists on children's creative and personal and social development, and across the foundation phase curriculum
- To explore how artists and galleries could develop children's thinking skills
- To explore how creative opportunities could be on offer continuously in an ordinary classroom
- To develop the confidence of practitioners in taking a child-led approach
- To document exemplary practice to disseminate other settings
- To explore how better links could be forged across different local authority resources and departments
- To identify successful approaches to documenting children's (and adults') learning journeys

### Project summary

Following two introductory sessions, a gallery visit provided the stimulus for a series of creative sessions in school, with ideas responding to children's interests and needs. Children used sketchbooks, made 3D constructions with willow, worked with coloured perspex shapes on a light box, made large-scale paintings and explored mark-making and clay. Activities were documented by teachers, the artist and the local authority. Staff used this to reflect with children on their learning. The gallery arranged an exhibition of this documentation, to which parents and families were invited.





### Outcomes

The project provided an example of the visual arts can provide a valuable starting point for learning across the Foundation Phase curriculum.

Children had particularly developed their personal and social skills.

*'As the project progressed, we saw increasing independence by the children in choosing and using materials appropriately and with increasing skill and control.'*



Staff had also seen a positive change in children's concentration levels, involvement and behaviour.

Naturally, creative development was a strong aspect of the project. Children had developed their concepts of 'art' and 'artists', experienced a range of creative processes and been encouraged to be confident in expressing their own ideas.



Language development was encouraged through the new experiences and materials encountered.



*'What are they made of?'*

Mathematical development, physical development (fine and gross motor skills), Welsh language development and children's knowledge and understanding of the world were all also seen to be furthered through the project.



The relationship forged with the gallery was an important outcome for the school.

*'My eyes have been opened to the value of a gallery visit for children this age.'*

The project had increased their confidence in delivering the Foundation Phase approach.

*'We've almost been guilty of over-planning to date; wanting everything to be tied down and structured. You get more time to observe when the children are working more autonomously, so it's actually all about a shift in your role.'*

The confidence of the project artist in working with young children had increased.

*'If approached in this kind of open ended, rather than didactic way, the creative thinking and experimenting processes of the artist and of the young child are brilliantly aligned. It makes for a really dynamic relationship.'*

The project had opened new doors for the gallery education officer too.

*'I feel more confident about accommodating young children in the gallery and providing them with enjoyable experiences. I also know who the right people are to communicate with in the early years sector.'*

### **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*.