

'HUNDREDS AND THOUSANDS' OF WAYS OF SPEAKING

Evaluation report for Moonbeams 2022/23 and pilot of the triad model for project development.

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It is hoped that this report reflects the contribution of all involved.

The following participants have waived their right to anonymity and their support is acknowledged here:

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1.0 THE HISTORY OF MOONBEAMS AND CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT PROJECT

1.1 The history of Moonbeams

Moonbeams has a 21-year legacy within Birmingham and across the West Midlands championing a creative and democratic ethos within its work. Originally conceived by Pepita Hannah and Cynthia Knight in 2002, the Moonbeams project continues to support its original aim of nurturing children's artistic and creative activity. A moonbeam by nature is ephemeral and elusive and the project seeks to grasp such moments with a view to spotlighting effective early creative arts practices. Moonbeams, supported throughout by Arts Connect and CREC, recognises the importance of early learning for culture, well-being and a life-long learning and is inspired by the creative and democratic approach to early childhood evidenced in Reggio Emilia and explored through the work of Malaguzzi (Edwards, Gandini and Foreman, 2012).

There have been several inceptions of Moonbeams focusing on various creative elements, including a Musical Moonbeams phase, and many of those artists and early years educators involved anecdotally report lifechanging experiences. Moonbeams has also sought to engage arts organisations in a bid to increase the impact of the approach beyond the individual and early years educators have naturally sought to cascade their learning to whole teams (e.g., Moonbeams, 2017).

1.2 Project's overarching philosophy

As stated above, Moonbeams seeks to nurture children's artistic and creative activity; the influence of the Reggio Emilia approach portrays children as active citizens and rights holders and supports artists and educators in



listening to The Hundred Languages of Children (Malaguzzi, cited Reggio Children, 2022). There are three central concepts within the Moonbeams approach overall and these continue to influence projects regardless of their specific focus:

Creativity underpins Moonbeams as a key learning disposition that influences children's cognitive emotional and social development. It recognises the value of both the processes and the outcomes of activities and seeks to support the original.

Deep level engagement (also known as flow, see Csikszentmihaly, 2002) equally underpins the Moonbeams approach where participants engage in the moment without distraction or thought for anything other than the focus itself. Such deep level engagement supports happiness and overall well-being as well as providing an optimal state for learning and development.

Participatory practice represents an underpinning philosophy in both the artistic practices and the research documentation of Moonbeams. This mirrors the democratic pedagogy illustrated by Reggio Emilia and the importance placed on children and their connection to the wider community. The recognition of The Hundred Languages of Children and this participatory approach within Moonbeams supports artists, educators and now wider community members to listen carefully to the voices of children.

In adopting a participatory approach within Moonbeams, the traditional balance of power within both early years encounters, and research, is revised and power is redistributed. Children lead artistic encounters; the children's interests therefore drive the direction of the project, and educators, artists and researchers follow. Supporting participatory practice is a reflective approach; Moonbeams 2022-23 protected reflective space for triad members through designated time and through embedding reflections within the action research approach.

1.3 Context of current project

This latest Moonbeams project sought to diversify and, influenced by the community approach within Reggio Emilia, wanted to extend beyond the tried and tested educator-artist pairing whilst maintaining a democratic and participatory approach. Moonbeams 2022-23 embarked upon a bold project to connect artists, early years educators and librarians in a triad model. This inception of Moonbeams sought to develop language and communication through arts and creativity using an action research triad partnership between libraries, early years settings and artists.



The focus specifically on language and communication was important for two reasons. Firstly, language and communication sits at the heart of early years practice alongside the physical and socio-emotional development of the child. We recognise that communication and language, along with those other elements, supports access to broader educational experience and promotes longer term development. Secondly, the result of a Covid catch-up rhetoric and the recognition that children missed out on important early language and communication opportunities during lockdown (Ofsted, 2021) further supported this project. Reggio Emilia provided inspiration in its community approach to children's education and encouraged a similar approach for Moonbeams 2022-23. Libraries offered the perfect partnership as they continue to develop as places of community connection and remain integral within public strategy.

The current context resulted in the following research questions:

- **How can we support children's communication and language development through sensory and creative experience?**
- **How do we listen to children and adopt participatory practice?**
- **What are the benefits and challenges of triad partnership?**



2.0 PROJECT RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 The research team

The Moonbeams triad programme was one element within a suite of activities supported by Arts Connect in 2022/23 including social meetings, podcasts and a conference opportunity. An enquiry group of stakeholders led by Arts Connect and supported by CREC, representative of early years education and care, museums, artists, and independent consultants, provided oversight of Moonbeams 2022-23 and ensured that the project overall met the needs of the sector.

The triad programme itself comprised a central team with representation from Arts Connect, CREC and two pedagogistas; one providing an artist insight and one an educator insight. Their specialist perspectives were focused on supporting the pedagogy of artists, educators and librarians as the project developed paying particular attention to the key focus of developing children's language and communication through creative approaches. CREC provided support for participatory action research to mirror the democratic approach within Reggio Emilia. Whilst each Moonbeams triad comprised an artist, an educator (representing an early years setting) and a librarian (representing a public library), the responsibility fell upon the library service to pair with the early years setting and to then make the initial application.



Arts Connect then matched an artist, following a selection process, resulting in three triads. The selected Moonbeams triads were located in *areas of deprivation* and sought an agenda of transformation for the children within a localised early years cohort.

The entire research team initially attended a planning and training day, facilitated by Arts Connect, that provided the opportunity for each triad to develop their shared ethos and to begin to plan their ten-session project. The day enabled the pedagogistas and the research team to develop a contextual understanding of each triad and to begin to plan support visits. The day also provided a brief overview of child development priorities, an overview of the Reggio Emilia ethos as well as basics of action research methodology. This initial day framed our community of practice as democratic, collaborative and context-driven.

A further mid-point reflective day enabled the entire research team to come together and share developments to date. This further supported the community of practice that was emerging and enabled cross-triad reflections from librarians, educators and artists. It also enabled each triad to refine their focus beyond the overarching research questions and to ensure their own enquiry was meeting the needs of their specific context.

2.2 An action research approach

Traditionally, action research provides a real-world approach to documenting change. It typically follows a cyclic approach of planning, doing and reviewing, and is embedded in the practicalities of daily life rather than exploration within a laboratory setting. In adopting systematic documentation and analysis, engagement in action research provides a rigorous and trustworthy approach through which knowledge generation can inform sector developments. Action research lends itself to a participatory approach as it seeks change within everyday practice. The Moonbeams 2022-23 triad programme, influenced by practice in Reggio Emilia, sought to be democratic and so a participatory approach was embedded within the documentation and research processes as well as within the sessions themselves. A participatory approach to research ensured that while the triads listened to the voices of the children in the sessions, the research listened to the voices of triad members in how to document and progress the project. This resulted in the development of three contrasting case studies, each focusing on the overarching research questions underpinned by Reggio Emilia philosophy, and each with their own additional focus.



2.3 Building three case studies

The specifics of the research design were planned by triad members; the location of activities, the target children/ groups, the materials and provocations used, and so on. Triad members connected initially through the summer of 2022 and mapped out a series of ten sessions within which artistic provocations would be woven within a library/ education setting with a focus on supporting language and communication through creativity. Each triad was also provided with additional research budget for a trip or experience, in keeping with the theme and scope of the research. Case studies provide insight into the complexity of a situation, appreciating differences. The Moonbeams triads were all operating within very different contexts and so selected the locations, the children, the materials and activities and the overall direction of their case study.



Case study one was located in Staffordshire between a library, a nearby Primary School and a visual artist with a fine art specialism. The library was walking distance from the school and the artist was travelling to sessions either within the Primary School setting or within the library.

Case study two was located in Telford and Wrekin between a library and a nearby Children's Centre with a verbal artist. This triad would be operating within two 'stay and play' sessions; one located within close proximity to the library and the other in the library itself. One session was an existing group of 'targeted' parents and the second session was a group set up specifically to support the outcomes of this research project.

Case study three was located in Solihull between a library, a nearby two-form-entry Primary School and a visual artist and maker who had worked previously in Moonbeams. Again, the library and Primary school were within walking distance of one another.

The case studies presented in section 3.0 illustrate the unique journey of each triad outlining their specific responses to the research questions, the methods they used, the challenges they encountered and the benefits they experienced.

2.4 Documenting the research process

Every research participant documented their own journey through the research process. Triads undertook regular reflective journaling and on visits pedagogistas and the lead researcher documented their discussions. During the whole team days, outlined above in section 2.3, administrative support enabled accurate documentation of discussion and reflection.

Triad members documented their reflections throughout the research process; this reflective journaling sought to provide insight into the complex interactions between the three organisations as well as to document the responses of the children and practitioners involved. Reflective journaling is a tried and tested method within qualitative research that attempts to provide transparency within the research process by making the 'messiness of the research process visible to the researcher who can then make it visible for those who read the research' (Ortlipp, 2008: 703). Triad members were free to record their research reflections in a manner that suited their own working practices whether this be electronic, written, drawn etc. Individuals' journals would then support collective planning for future sessions as well as supporting research analysis.

Alongside journaling, all triads met either before or after sessions to reflect upon children's interactions and to plan for future sessions. These reflective spaces became instrumental in directing the research focus and maintaining the three-way collaboration. At two points, midway and then towards the end of the research cycle, the lead researcher joined these reflective sessions to support research documentation and analysis.

To support individuals' documentation of the research process, a shared online space was developed using the platform Basecamp. This provided a secure, working space for each triad to share documents and enabled the wider research team to provide support and remain responsive to ongoing research queries.



The platform supported scheduling, storage and 'chat' facilities and became the primary mechanism for communication.

2.5 Ethics

Democracy and participation were the prevailing considerations for all working within Moonbeams 2022-23. An essential element of the project was that each triad would be contextually specific and meet the needs of the children within their locality, much like in Reggio Emilia.

Each triad was encouraged to adopt a democratic and non-hierarchical approach enabling all members to contribute. CREC's code of ethics was followed at all times which is informed by EECERA ethical guidance (Bertram et al., 2015).

Specifically, the research sought to highlight:

- the child within their context and community through the pilot of the triad model;
- democratic values through non-hierarchical and contextually specific research;
- social justice and equality through a careful selection of libraries within areas of greater need;
- social contribution through the focus on communication and language in the post-Covid era.

An ethical approach was followed with regards to research practice itself when:

- early years settings provided permission to access and parents provided informed and voluntary consent for their children's participation;
- anonymity was provided for all participants;
- children's assent was sought in terms of their participation in arts encounters;
- participants were seen as subjects with rights and voice rather than objects;
- an inclusive and non-discriminatory approach was adopted;
- regular reflective feedback supported the development of the project.

Additionally, ethical considerations dictated the secure storage of research data, a participatory research process through which all triad members were valued, and the need for the research to be worthwhile and informative for the sector. Wider dissemination was sought through conference, podcast recording and through this research report.

2.6 Participatory analysis

Following the ethical requirement of participation, each triad analysed their data in an iterative and reflective manner within their weekly sessions. The discussions largely focused on how the children's language and communication was being supported by creative and sensory experiences and how children might further participate in the development of this. Visits from Moonbeams pedagogistas supported the maintenance of this focus and additional support and exemplification was provided around typical language development as well as a participatory, Reggio inspired ethos. In sessions with the lead CREC researcher the third research focus on triad working was explored and documented in greater detail.

To support both analysis and dissemination each triad prepared their own case study, highlighting key findings and presented to the Moonbeams Conference, February 2023. In developing their shared narrative in a participatory way, the case studies captures the voice of artists, educators and librarians and the children (and families) they represent.



3.0 CASE STUDIES

References to localised data is withheld to support anonymity throughout this section. Direct quotes from triad members are presented in italics.

Photographs are published with consent

3.1 Staffordshire

Additional research focus: transitions and transformation

The first case study took place within the county of Staffordshire within a ward home to a typically aging population; ward level data does not reflect that this location has recently also become home to families newly arrived to the UK. The library and small Primary school are located within close proximity to one another in the centre of town; it is possible to see the library building from the school environment. The teacher was the lead for early years foundation stage (EYFS) provision within the school and teaches children across nursery and reception age groupings. Family literacy levels can be low in this area and school has previously experienced some challenges with parental engagement relating to this. This location was paired with a visual artist specialising in fine art and with experience working within a Reggio Emilia approach in schools.

This case study began in the summer term 2022 within the EYFS provision in school and targeted nursery aged children who would be transitioning to reception (4-5 years old). Initial visits took place within the school environment to introduce the artist and librarian to the children and to support discussion around the targeted children who needed additional support with their communication and language needs.



Ten sessions were scheduled across the summer and subsequent autumn term and the initial intent was to walk the children over to the library as soon as possible. This aim was curtailed by extreme summer temperatures that prevented the children leaving the school environment and then in the autumn term the public space within the library was used to support a book of condolence following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

This delay in transitioning to the library space did not prevent the triad from beginning their Moonbeams sessions with the children and their starting point was a book exploring under the sea which was selected to follow on from children's previous interests. A lightbox was used with colourful tissue paper and a range of seaside materials such as rocks and shells. Jewellery represented treasure and the children focused individually on their play. In these early sessions much of the children's communication was non-verbal as they explored alongside one another; however, one reluctant talker flourished during this session and created a whole narrative around a rockpool and the triad were able to reflect upon how the provocation and their presence had supported this.

Within this setting, Monday was Moonbeams day and the teacher, following the Reggio Emilia influence, sought to embed a Moonbeams element within classroom practice for the remainder of the week and this supported continuity for the children. Leaving work in situ was more difficult within the library space as here the Moonbeams triad made use of a multipurpose meeting room and needed to navigate adult furniture and other community groups.

Through the initial Moonbeams Mondays, the children's interests developed around the theme of transitions and transformations and both the librarian and artist began to source related provocations. Clay and wire were added to the range of resources offered to the children to support their explorations of change. Bumblebear by Nadia Shireen provided further provocation as the children began to consider their own transformations.

The artist provided a selection of loose parts resources and children began to make their own shields and masks as they transformed into superheroes.



This particular provocation captured the imagination of one newly arrived child; this child initially used the shield, and the superhero persona this created, to communicate non-verbally with peers, even falling down to indicate when he wanted play to stop. This socio-dramatic play developed into simple commands and short sentences within the space of a few short weeks; in his superhero mask he stood staring at his teacher and said *'I am trying to know you.'* The whole triad were able to reflect upon the positive impact creative exploration had on this child's language and communication.



The development of the triad through the research process did not match initial expectations, *'roles haven't been defined, we've just all gelled,'* and with *'no division of labour'* it was possible to *'pool observations after each session, replicating that reflective Reggio approach.'* This triad was able to schedule extended reflective space after Monday morning Moonbeams sessions and then continue their reflections beyond through their online/ shared space. Whilst acknowledging that each triad member came with different priorities they had in fact *'waited to see what the children were doing and what they needed,'* illustrating the participatory nature of their project. This triad found the logistics of organising their trip somewhat challenging as opportunities locally were not always open on a Monday to fit with librarian and artist availability. The triad were also very keen to ensure the experience was in keeping with the children's interests and the overall participatory philosophy of the programme and so arranged a "Sublime Science" workshop at the library to further the exploration of change. Involving visitors within an existing Moonbeams space illustrated the shared philosophy developed by the triad over time and they all found it difficult to balance the expectations of the provider with the needs of the children.

Considering the research questions:

<p>How can we support children's communication and language development through sensory and creative experience?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative and sensory provocations were selected specifically to encourage communication e.g., through social play. • Language and communication was 'more exposed' during the Moonbeams session as the teacher was in a space of shared adult responsibility. • Vocabulary was extended through the use of story books as prompts. • The creative and sensory activities attracted children with a range of communication and language needs; adult support ensured those who needed language support were targeted. • Sensory and creative experiences were found to benefit children for whom English is not the first language; 'these children can show us what they can do rather than not being able to access what we tell them to do.' • The Moonbeams approach was compatible with other approaches in school e.g., WellCom.
<p>How do we listen to children and adopt participatory practice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floor books enable the documentation of children's interests and prompt further reflective discussion with children. • 'Different children were the star of the show each week,' and this meant that a range of children's interests were embedded within the ten-week project.
<p>What are the benefits and challenges of triad working?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The children have enjoyed and benefitted from their visits to the library space including the walk there under the subway as well as their interactions with the librarian. • The children have benefitted from the resources and provocations provided by the artists as well as through their interactions. • All triad members are positive about the benefits of their shared reflective space and the wisdom they have been able to share with one another, 'I need to know what I'm looking for, important things might pass me by.' • The role of the adult within Moonbeams sessions was fluid and responded to the children; for the educator this was a particularly liberating experience. • Challenges remain regarding the use of shared community spaces; scheduling, shared occupancy and adult furniture were issues.
<p>Additional focus: transitions and transformation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moonbeams provides a mechanism for transition between nursery and reception. • A creative and sensory play-based approach enables children to develop their understanding of core concepts as they test ideas. This was evident in the materials they engaged with as well as within socialisation.

3.2 Telford and Wrekin

Additional research focus: supporting families in developing communication and language

The second case study took place within the borough of Telford and Wrekin within a district which has pockets of deprivation and a typically aging population. The library service joined with the locality children's centre whose remit was to support children and their families and worked in partnership with a range of additional services. The lead educator was the development officer for services for children 0-19. This location was paired with a verbal artist working with words, stories and prosody.

The triad members had some reservations as the project began. For the development officer time and capacity was a concern as the breadth and administrative requirements of their role left little time for additional demands. The librarian was excited at the open and participatory brief within Moonbeams but recognised that the project would 'take me out of my comfort zone.' The verbal artist, whilst confident within their own skills and abilities, recognised that 'all work would be mediated by parents' [and carers] and questioned whether they would be ready to engage.

Planning for the project began in summer 2022 but due to the voluntary nature of attendance at some children's centre groups an autumn start was prepared and the triad prepared two sessions each week in local stay and play facilities. The morning sessions were arranged through the librarian, were located in the local library and engaged families that had previously attended *bounce and rhyme* sessions. The afternoon sessions involved the triad joining an existing group with a remit under the *strengthening families* agenda, meaning that these families had been identified as benefitting from additional support.

The morning group was attended largely by babies and their parents and this took place within a community library space.



Each session started with a song and a story and then provocations were provided within boxes. Initially parents took the lead with these boxes and opened lids and explored contents some providing an ongoing narrative. As the weeks progressed, and following a Reggio Emilia inspired approach, *'everyone has learned to ease back and take it at the pace of the children.'* The children were encouraged to explore the boxes, maybe tapping a rhythm, before opening the lid and selecting contents for themselves. In later sessions it was taking up to 15 minutes to open the box and the parents [and carers] were following the pace of their children.

The pre-existing nature of the afternoon session meant that initially the Moonbeams triad were invited to take up space as one activity station within a rotation of early years focused activities. Play during these sessions was between a parent [carer] and their child at an activity station and families were initially reluctant to engage with triad members and the open-ended 'junk' resources that they had provided. The triad were able to reflect with the group organiser that these isolated play stations did not encourage language and communication and they asked for consent to bring all stations together in one Moonbeams provocation.



The subsequent session was deemed a success all round, 'language went up, play went up, and Moonbeams moments went up.' The practitioner leading the session could see how all areas of the EYFS (DfE, 2021) had been covered and sought to continue working in a holistic way. All triad members were able to reflect upon issues of power within these sessions and whilst there was an increase in language and communication, the parents retained power and controlled children's engagement; 'as soon as a parent disengages you've lost the child... [name redacted] had no power she just picked him up and whisked him away.'

The development of this triad was not without challenge as unfortunately the development officer missed the final research analysis and the development of the case study. The resulting case study, and its dissemination at the Moonbeams conference, fell to the verbal artist and librarian who were able to share their Reggio inspired project and positive language and communication outcomes. They were also able to arrange a trip which furthered the relationships between families and enabled the group to confidently occupy different spaces within the wider community.



Considering the research questions:

<p>How can we support children's communication and language development through sensory and creative experience?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative and sensory provocations supported language and communication within both created and inherited structures and were most effective within an informal space. • Supporting parents by modelling language and modelling a child led approach; 'children are experts, they work with what we put out.' • Singing demonstrated play with language and communication.
<p>How do we listen to children and adopt participatory practice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modelling a child led approach, as above, equally supports participatory practice by encouraging the same of parents and carers. • Listening to parents is as important as listening to the children within community sessions; through listening to parents' sessions will evolve to meet their needs.
<p>What are the benefits and challenges of triad working?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The triad approach proved sustainable; two members were able to maintain the project to completion. • Existing relationships supported the development of sessions; when working with families a range of community venues and services can support. • The children and families benefitted from the sensory and creative exploration provided by the artist. • Families welcomed sessions in community venues and, with young babies, sessions within public spaces were easy to facilitate. • Operating a Moonbeams session within a pre-existing group requires the careful negotiation of group norms and rules; a strong pedagogical approach enabled Moonbeams triad members to challenge with confidence.
<p>Additional focus: transitions and transformation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moonbeams provides a participatory approach to working with parents and carers and through this participatory and creative practice can be modelled, 'the parents love that we didn't rush the children,' and this approach was reported to be transferred to the home environment. • The role of triad members is different when working alongside parents and children as interaction with children is negotiated through ongoing parental assent.

3.3 Solihull

Additional research focus: permissions

Our third case study sits within a disadvantaged ward within the more typically affluent Metropolitan Borough of Solihull; this ward illustrates the prosperity gap evident in this region. Here the local library service paired with a local two-form entry school, walking distance from the library building. This location was matched to an artist/maker/educator with a specialism for sculpture and mosaic; an artist with previous experience of working within Moonbeams and aligned with the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

Starting in summer 2022 this triad, like our first case study in Staffordshire, began with nursery children as they were set to transition into reception (4-year-olds). Within this case study the size of the school provided a challenge, being two form-entry, there were two classes of children within the scope of the Moonbeams project. School leadership preferred an inclusive approach and wanted all children to benefit from some interaction with Moonbeams sessions and our triad accommodated, though this was not without challenge, *'the numbers of children has made it difficult.'*



When in school, both classes were engaged with Moonbeams accessing both the story provided by the librarian and in accessing the range of loose parts provided by the artist. These were busy sessions but enabled the triad to take their Moonbeams moments into the outdoor space and to use large scale objects. The triad members were able to engage with, and observe, targeted children within the larger group but always remained aware of meeting the needs and interests of all children. The children quickly built relationships with the artist and librarian who were considered 'famous' around school and some of the children particularly enjoyed a positive male role model within their early years environment, something they do not typically experience.

The logistics of walking the group over to the library meant that classes visited on rotation and made use of the children's library, a public space, for their Moonbeams session. The routine of the session remained the same and a story and suitcase were used as an initial provocation. Again, triad members were able to notice those children targeted for support with language and communication whilst ensuring the whole class were immersed in a sensory and creative experience, *'there's not one child who isn't motivated by the Moonbeams experience.'*



Triad roles were flexible during sessions although typically the artist would share the creative provocation and the librarian would share the book. As the children explored their space and the materials the triad members were 'consciously modelling what they could do and how they could look at the world differently.' Clare Thompson's work (e.g., Junk D.N.A.) was used as additional loose parts provocation and the children sought permission to use materials in open-ended ways.

The routine of Moonbeams sessions also supported the development of children's language and communication skills. The walk to the library became central to this as the children engaged in communication about their environment and used the time the walk afforded to further develop relationships. Equally the time to tidy up the Moonbeams session was important in both the development of communication and language and in the participatory nature of the project. The children worked respectfully to ensure that creations were documented before they were dismantled and they worked collaboratively to put resources away; the folding of large fabric, corner to corner, in pairs was done with focus and precision. Photographs captured what could not be preserved and were bought back to future sessions.



During this phase of the session the children would negotiate which aspects could be transported into their school environment, illustrating the participatory decision making about the continuation into the school environment.

Photographs supported this in documenting the children's engagement and participation and in providing prompt for reflective discussion. Reflective discussion took place after each Moonbeams session and this supported the teacher in tracking communication and language outcomes for the targeted children specifically. This protected space also facilitated planning discussions that supported the triad in following children's interests. It was acknowledged that, whilst the reflective discussion was invaluable, the process continued beyond that time and space and, particularly for the artist in considering the provocations for the following week, there would often be adjustments to plans based on new ideas or opportunities that arose.

Rather than providing a trip for the children, the Solihull triad invited a baby opera experience into the library space. Like the Staffordshire triad there had been difficulties sourcing an appropriate experience and the triad felt that visiting the library remained exciting for the children.



Considering the research questions:

<p>How can we support children's communication and language development through sensory and creative experience?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative and sensory provocations provided time for exploration and within this space communication and language thrived; supporting adults had time to tune into this communication. • Providing a range of large- and small-scale loose parts provoked creative responses in children and for which they were able to confidently develop a narrative. Children who typically lacked confidence with oracy were confident to talk to others about their creations. • Modelling from adults provided permission for children to use materials in an open-ended way and this further promoted communication and language development.
<p>How do we listen to children and adopt participatory practice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following children's interests by observing their deep engagement during sessions; planning was always responsive to children's engagement. • Providing permission for children to respond to the loose parts in their own way further embedded a participatory approach. • Listening to the children at transitional phases (before and after) enabled the continuation of Moonbeams threads beyond the session.
<p>What are the benefits and challenges of triad working?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The triad recognised their own areas of strength and areas for development, 'we work really well together, we're all different and we all bring different things.' • The addition of a library space was seen as a benefit to the project and something beyond the previous experiences, 'quite nervous about how this would work.' The triad held their first meeting in the library space to ensure they could understand this new environment. • Roles have complemented one another and overlapped as the project has progressed. • Organisational structure within library and school has influenced the triad from group size to suitable storage; illustrated the theme of permissions outlined below.
<p>Additional focus: transitions and transformation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The theme of permissions has been present throughout and impacted on different triad members in different ways. • For the teacher the paperwork involved ensuring permissions are in place for all children for leaving school, taking photographs etc presented a challenge. • For all the permission to 'disrupt' the library space was liberating. Children created small- and large-scale responses to the books and provocations shared and noise was part of that response. • For the children there was permission to respond as they wanted; outcomes were not predetermined.

4.0 PEDAGOGISTA'S PERSPECTIVES

In visits to all three triads the pedagogistas were able to see Moonbeams sessions in action and to engage in reflective dialogue. Whilst all three case studies presented differences in their routine, structure and activities, pedagogistas reflected upon common aspects within:

Planning and undertaking Moonbeams sessions could be like 'building Lego on a glass floor' as all triads needed to carefully negotiate the physical and sometimes the socio-emotional space they were occupying; often with no power over the day of the week, the timings within a school or organisational day, or the number of children and adults that would be involved. The structure and infrastructure around them significantly impacted on their sessions and tackling this required just as much creativity as they were planning for the sessions themselves.



The space required for Moonbeams was also a topic for discussion and careful planning was given to the balance of time between the library and the early years setting and how the space would be utilised. The transitional aspect of this was evident for our two school-based case studies as this became additional opportunity for language and communication development.

Equally important in influencing Moonbeams sessions was the personal and professional viewpoints that everyone brought along, 'we don't see things how they are, we see things how we are.' The triads all report good collegiate relationships which facilitated Moonbeams but equally some individuals reflected on their own preconceptions when starting the project and how these influenced decision making. As the project developed all triads saw greater flexibility in how they worked and have an appreciation of the professional challenges of others within the wider team.

Finally, both pedagogistas saw creativity in each and every visit and reflective discussion. From creative approaches to managing the project itself to the creative outputs of the children. Within these creative experiences the children's language and communication was flourishing.



5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Whilst each case study sought to respond to their own context there were saliences across the research questions. The following summary represents the three case studies and the reflections of the wider research team through basecamp and during preparation for dissemination.

How can we support children's communication and language development through sensory and creative experience?

- Young children's communication and language skills develop rapidly and are influenced by many complex factors but all triads were able to pinpoint specific children who responded to the Moonbeams approach in ways that they had not responded previously.
- Moonbeams enabled children to work alongside, and communicate with, an artist and a librarian and the children across all three triads appear to relish new connections. Equally artists and librarians tuned into children's language and communication and shared reflections with teachers.
- Loose parts provocations alongside books, rhyme and song enable a breadth of communication from non-verbal to the verbal. These affordances are limitless.
- The Moonbeams philosophy provides time for communication within and beyond sessions as does transitions between physical spaces.

How do we listen to children and adopt participatory practice?

- The time afforded by Moonbeams supports time to listen to children; librarians specifically noticed the unhurried nature of the sessions.
- Noticing children's engagement and interests enables adults to plan meaningful experiences; artists particularly noticed the expressions of enjoyment and happiness as children participated.
- Providing adults with reflective time and space supports their ability to listen and respond to children's interests. Documentation further supports this for both adults and children.
- Listening to parents and modelling a listening approach with their children extends the influence beyond the session.

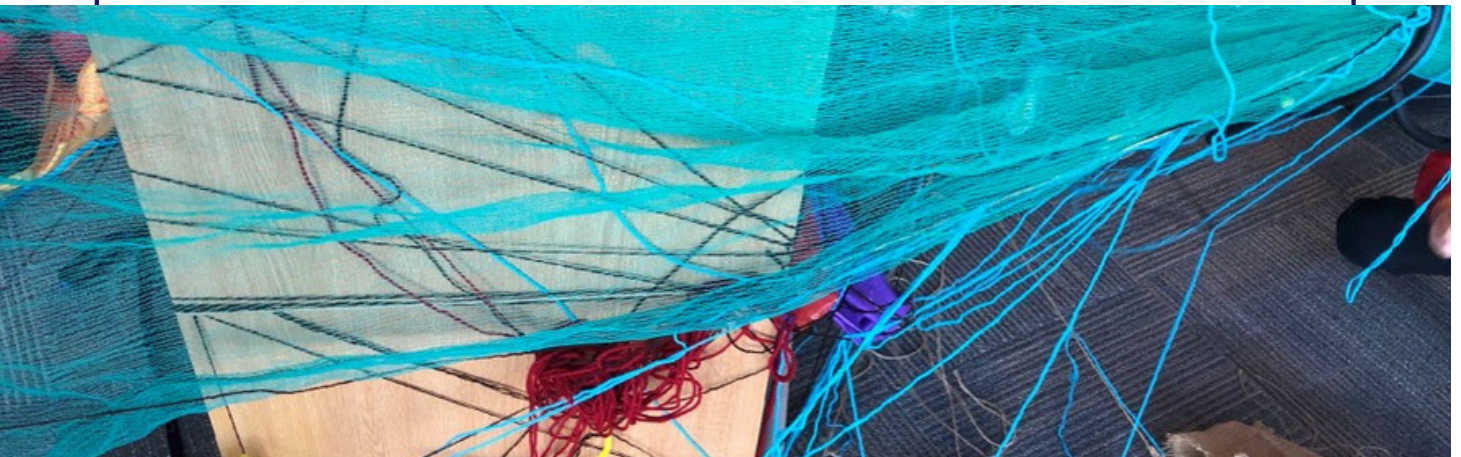
What are the benefits and challenges of triad partnership?

- Triad members have benefitted professionally developing both practice and research elements.
- Community connections are strengthened and all triads will seek to sustain these.
- The division of labour was flexible, responsive and a strength of the approach.
- Reflective time and space supported triad development.
- Dominant discourse and predetermined expectations can challenge the creative approach within Moonbeams; with time and through exploring permissions these barriers can be removed.
- The financial implications of triad working challenges longer term sustainability, particularly within times of economic uncertainty.
- The shared use of public spaces 'civil blending,' and the expectations of library spaces has the potential to challenge; flexible and creative responses made shared space work effectively in this project and such spaces will require negotiation.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the Moonbeams 2022/23 action research project 'Hundreds and Thousands of ways of speaking' including a pilot of the triad model for project development the following recommendations are offered:

- Opportunities for creative and open-ended exploration to support language and communication should be protected within the wider demands of EYFS provision.
- Library connections should be further developed for the benefit of the youngest children; where libraries and schools are within walking distance of one another this should be expected and, where distance is an obstacle, librarians should be visiting children within school. Libraries can also make use of a loose-parts approach when facilitating family sessions during holiday periods or for preschool groups; this approach has the potential to make use of more sustainable resources and to model a Reggio-inspired pedagogy to parents and carers.
- Funding should be made available to ensure children benefit from regular contact with artists, specialising across media, as they progress through school. Libraries, schools and early years provision also experience funding restrictions that will impact on staff availability to engage in projects such as Moonbeams; 'How do we sustain our triad working in three very underfunded sectors when it is considered so important?'
- Triad working should be further explored as a community-based project development model; there is the capacity to extend this work to museums, galleries and other public spaces.



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