



Find Your
TALENT



Small Bodies Big Voices

Report July 2009
By Liz Clark



Supported by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Small Bodies Big Voices

Small Bodies Big Voices, funded by Find Your Talent, was a partnership between The Y, freelance dance artists and twelve Early Years settings across Leicester City and Leicestershire. The sessions took place from April – July 2009. 125 children, 33 parents and 49 Early Years Practitioners took part in the project which consisted of:

- Preliminary meeting at each setting with the lead artist to discuss the aims of the project.
- Two training sessions for Early Years practitioners.
- Eight weekly creative movement session in each setting.
- Reflective evaluation after every creative session and training event.

Personnel

Project Management: Ruth Bates, Dance Development Officer for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

Lead Dance Artist: Liz Clark

Dance Artists: Louise Jaggard and Helen Barwell

Shadowing Dance Artists: Hannah Sperry and Sarah Drummond

Settings:	Belgrave Children's Centre	Cobden Children's Centre,
	Shelthorpe Children's Centre	Rowley Fields Children's Centre
	Barwell Children's Centre	Woodbridge Children's Centre
	Lilliput Montessorri Nursery	The Y (open session)
	Danemill Primary School	Redmoor Children's Centre
	Highfields Children's Centre	Netherall Children's Centre

Aims:

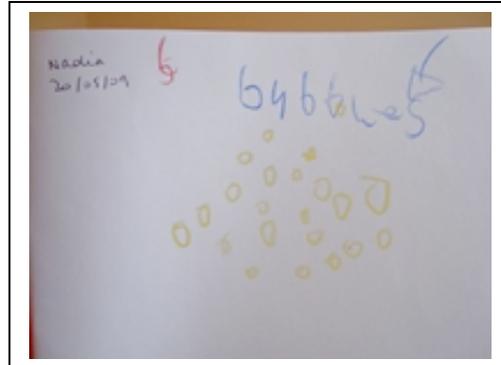
Small Bodies Big Voices aims to:

- provide creative movement sessions that will encourage children to fully explore their movement potential and become confident, independent learners.
- enable children to communicate their choices and explore how these choices impact their learning.
- work with parents, childminders and early year practitioners in developing understanding of creativity and the importance of tuning into choices made by children.

Documentation:

- Each dance artist kept a record of their session plans which were subsequently given to their Early Years Practitioner.
- Parents and children were encouraged to reflect on their sessions by mark making, drawing and writing in notebooks. Photographs taken during the sessions helped to support this process.
- A brief evaluation was done after every session by artist and early years practitioner focussing on the children's participation and choices. Comments by parents and practitioners were noted down in the artists books each week.

- Early Years practitioners and artists conducted a detailed evaluation at the final training session.
- The lead dance artist also delivered training for dance artists in Leicester and Leicestershire who wanted to develop their practice with Early Years.



The findings in this report include:

- Images of the children and adults involved.
- Comments from Early Years Practitioners and parents.
- Comments by children either made during or after creative sessions.
- Comments from the dance artists leading the sessions.

Key to abbreviations within the report

SBBV = Small Bodies Big Voices
 CCM = Children's Centre Manager
 EYP = Early Years Practitioner
 TA = Teaching Assistant

CCT = Children's Centre Teacher
 CC = Children's Centre
 SA = Shadowing Artist
 FSW = Family Support Worker

Aim: SBBV aims to provide creative movement sessions that will encourage children to fully explore their potential and become confident, independent learners.

Dance artists bring a new dimension to an early years settings. They are highly trained in communicating with their bodies and observing other peoples movements. Dance artists encourage children to engage in activities by modelling involvement, often becoming wholly engrossed in the activity themselves.

Dance artists see the experience as a shared exploration of creative play, stepping back where necessary to allow a child's creative idea to develop, and intervening when a creative idea needs help to develop and flourish.

Dance artists make themselves available to children enabling children to explore their world, relationships and materials safely through their bodies.



SBBV was a child-led project, with much of the content of the sessions being influenced and directed by the children involved.

“The children...were allowed time to become familiar, more confident and secure with the expectations, they did not have to dance ‘in the style of’ and the children led the movement with the adults following”

Tina Jenner, CCT, Highfields CC



The artist gave the children the opportunity to experiment in a carefree and relaxed environment, encouraging them to explore movement, sound and their own bodies”

Chris Rothwell, FSW, Redmoor CC

Young children communicate through their bodies and during SBBV we found that this was an important means for them to make choices. This was particularly fundamental where English may not be a child's first language, where a child may have complex or additional needs or for younger children who are pre-verbal.

"They can communicate what they want, last week parents said the children didn't understand what we were saying to them in English but in this session the children can make choices, immediate choices with their bodies, language is not a barrier"

Linda Smith, CCT, Belgrave CC



"Adam loves these sessions, it's all about the interaction with the children. He is so happy and he let us know it with his body... This is a surprise as he normally has so much difficulty in changing rooms and environments"

Joy Robinson, EYP, Shelthorpe CC

Aim: Small Bodies Big Voices aims to enable children to communicate their choices and explore how these choices impact their learning.

During SBBV artists were deliberate in employing creative strategies to enable children to make choices. Each of these strategies had a different impact on the children's involvement and learning.

- **Moving together encourages positive relationships**

Through varying the types of activities the dance artists and early years practitioners encouraged children to work in different types of relationships; with other children in pairs, small groups, bigger groups, with adults, with dance artists and on their own. Moving together often became a shared experience, with the children cooperating with and negotiating each other and resources. Children also learned about their own physical boundaries and how to respect those of other children.



The growth in children's independence and confidence has been most apparent when working with children and their parents. The children have made gradual shifts away from dancing in the safe vicinity of their parents;

"That's amazing, that's the first time Sophie's said goodbye. I think the session made her feel more welcome and brought her out of herself. She was much less clingy to her mum"

Vicky Bott, EYP, Woodbridge CC (after the first dance session)

- **Copying, reflecting back and affirmation are powerful tools to engage children**

The approach of copying children's movement was used very sensitively throughout the entire project. This approach had the impact of the children's choices being amplified by the adults. Their self-esteem grew as their movements were celebrated and affirmed. "There was a power shift from adults to children" Linda Smith, Belgrave Children's Centre.



Ruby: "I was spinning, Kim was copying. I went pop"

Liz: "Did Kim copy you?"

Ruby: "Yes, it felt warm"

Ruby aged 3, Shelthorpe CC

"The concept of 'there is no wrong' is a powerful motivator for children"

Sam Graveling, Manager, Lilliput Nursery

"Everything you do in the sessions is about affirmation, it's confidence building, it's empowering because they feel they can do it, and they can do it... and we copy them"

Diana Mackey, Lead Professional for Children's Centre teachers, commenting on session at for Rowley Fields CC

- **Waiting for children to engage in their own time and on their own terms is essential for developing spontaneous, creative activities.**

"It's about giving the children the waiting time and therefore the thinking time... Rio was much more able to get involved and handle change in the session because of this"
Linda Smith CCT Belgrave CC.

"The children were able to gain the confidence at their own pace. Once they gained their confidence they slowly joined in when they wanted to"
Kay Patadia, EYP, Highfields

"The non-threatening nature of the sessions meant that the children became more confident and more spontaneous in their interactions with the adults, each other and the resources"
Tina Jenner, CCT, Highfields CC

- **Using props gave children more confidence to explore their bodies in innovative ways**

“I’ve really enjoyed it! It’s amazing how giving the children a prop really sparks their imagination. They’ve come up with such creative ways of moving and they love it!”

Mrs Dewick, TA, Danemill Primary



“Some of the children have been very unsure about participating at the start of the sessions and have chosen to watch others rather than joining in themselves. However, once props have been introduced their inhibitions seem to disappear and they join in with enthusiasm.”

Louise Jaggard, Dance Artist



- **Revisiting activities builds on the children’s learning**

“As an adult you don’t want to revisit learning because it’s boring but practising and revisiting is so important for children, it’s about refining those skills and building confidence”

Linda Smith CCT, Belgrave CC



“They are all getting so much more confident about their own ability.... Of what they are capable of. Different movements and ideas come so easily to them now!”

Tina Jenner, CCT, Highfields

- **The use of symbols provide a valuable means for exploring choice.**

In a setting where there are children with additional needs the dance artist worked closely with the staff to integrate a picture exchange process already used in the nursery and apply it to the dance sessions. After experiencing and creating a range of activities with the children, the staff developed a visual timetable so the children could build their own session each week. As each activity is explored the children decide when an activity is ‘finished’ and remove the card signifying a move to the next experience. The dance session is now being continued by the staff at the centre.



- **Celebration and having fun.**

All the Early Years Practitioners involved in SBBV recognised the importance of observing children's choices, no matter how small or big. The project helped all the adults involved in the project, especially parents, to tune in to these choices and helped them to celebrate children's achievements.



"It's a party!" Amy aged 2
"Yeeeeaaaaah!" Lucie aged 19 months

Aim: Small Bodies Big Voices aims to work with parents, childminders and early years practitioners in developing an understanding of creativity and the importance of tuning into choices made by children.

- **Adults play an important role in enabling children to engage in creative experiences**

Adults are responsible for creating safe and appropriate spaces to dance, whether it is a cleared room, a corner of the nursery or an outside space. SBBV took place in a variety of spaces, with dance artists encouraging early years practitioners to rethink possible barriers to using smaller or outdoor spaces.

During sessions adults play the vital role of enabler to the children, creating permission to explore and move with bodies through modelling movement ideas. The adults involved in SBBV became more skilled at tuning in to children's movement choices and, parents in particular, were more aware of the temptation of "filling in" for children by talking for them, doing or moving for them.

When working with parents it was essential to encourage them to take risks with their own bodies. As the sessions developed parents became more aware of the importance of their participation in the session, to not only be down on the floor with their children but sometimes be upside down!

"It encourages her, you take notice, she's got your attention because sometimes you are busy, you know cleaning the house and stuff, it's nice to do something together"

Tammy, mum to Lucie aged 2





“The adults copying the children develops an “I can” mentality – that’s what its all about, giving space for the children’s thought processes, the adults waiting and giving space for thinking and choosing”
Linda Smith, CCT, Belgrave CC

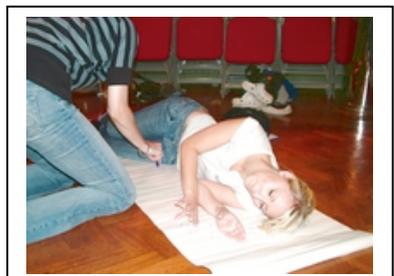
“Being taught how to support children, with ideas, concepts and props, has meant they have been able to explore movement without limitations on their imaginations”
Sam Graveling, Manager, Lilliput Nursery



“I was surprised that someone so little responded like that; enthusiastically, intuitively, spoken language wasn’t the main thing, the body conversations that were going on was fantastic!”
Linda Smith, CCT, Belgrave CC

- **Training provides adults with the confidence to use their own bodies and reflect on their learning**

The training for Early Years Practitioners was an essential part of the SBBV project. During the training we explored new materials, road tested ideas used with the children and created new ideas. Practitioners developed a better understanding of creative movement through using their own bodies.



Key outcomes

The SBBV project has had a positive impact on:

- **children's confidence in their own ideas, in their bodies and their capacity to make positive choices.**

"Over the past week, she's really come out of herself. On Friday's stay and play she was like a different person!"

Vicky, EYP, Woodbridge CC, talking about Parisha

- **other areas of learning such as speaking and listening, mark making, creative play and social interaction.**

"When they've done the dance they are much more creative afterwards, in their choice of materials..."
Janice Wormleighton,
Rowley Fields



Small bodies... speaking more, describing their environment around them, sounds of delight..."
Sarah Drummond, SA,
Rowley Fields

"Children who have been involved in dancing had a sustained focus on other activities afterwards, such as mark making, they were much more engaged."

Diana Mackey, Lead Professional for
Children's Centre Teachers.



Their mark making skills have grown...and for those children who had a language barrier, I feel that their understanding has grown vastly"

Kay Patidia, Highfields CCT

- **parent's interactions with their children, which will have a long-term impact on their engagement with creative and cultural activities.**



"The session allowed parents and children to bond on a different level. Moving together cause children and parents to learn about each other, see each other in a new light, give greater understanding of likes, dislikes and sense of self"

Sarah Drummond SA, Rowley Fields



‘It’s really made me think about how I play with Orson and what toys I give him. I’ve started to give him toys that can allow him to be more imaginative.’

Tanya, Orson’s (aged 1) mum, The Y Open session

‘We used to roll around together and play all the time. Now she’s a bit older, we don’t do it anymore. We haven’t had fun like that for ages. I’ve forgotten how good it was!’

Tejal, Dharmi’s (aged 2 ½) mum, The Y open session

- **Early Years practitioners understanding of the importance of providing opportunities for children to explore through their bodies.**

‘It makes them feel special, I’m definitely going to continue these sessions with the children and introduce other children and members of staff to it’

Kim Gibson EYP, Shelthorpe CC

Conclusions

Small children communicate and therefore make choices primarily through their bodies. Small Bodies Big Voices provided new opportunities to explore the ways in which children use their bodies to communicate. The project succeeded in affirming and celebrating children’s choices and as a consequence developed confidence and self-esteem in adults and children.

‘This is so different to anything else that goes on in the centre, it’s about how we choose to move with our bodies, and these little bodies are so good at it’

Linda Smith, CCT, Belgrave CC



‘A fantastic group opportunity for building confidence and self esteem in all bodies, big and little’

Janice Wormleighton,
Rowley Fields CC

SBBV recognizes that children’s choices are often immediate and it’s the adult’s role to tune in to those choices, no matter how small or large. These choices are a vital part of the way a child connects with the world and their communication of who they are and what they are learning.

Further developments

SBBV is delighted that a large proportion of the settings involved in the project are continuing the dance and movement work. This is a testimony to the way the project was organised, with high quality delivery alongside training. It is also an indication of how highly valued this approach is in early years settings and how vital it is in helping early years practitioners in fulfilling the targets within the Early Years Foundation Stage.

There are two main outcomes of this project that need further exploration. The first is the success with which the project enabled children to make choices through their bodies. There is a challenge to all organisations that work with children and young people to ensure they are addressing this valuable kinaesthetic means of making choices about their learning.

“We live in a society that places value on what children can say and write, this project celebrates what children know and can communicate through their bodies.”

Liz Clark, Lead Dance Artist

The second area for further development is working with parents and children. Parents sometimes came to sessions inappropriately dressed for movement, sometimes their own need to discuss the past weeks events took precedence over their involvement with their children.

“I found it fascinating, you could discreetly see where parents inconfidence was, unless you have been part of a group like this you would not be able to identify this”.

Diana Mackey, Lead Professional for Children’s Centre Teachers.

In one setting there were incidents of parents “pushing” their children onto the dance artists and there was a suggestion from parents that the ‘teacher’ offered the better experience and could ‘teach’ their children. There is an urgent need for further projects working specifically in the area of child led creative interactions and how parents can tune into children’s bodies which can provide such a crucial key to a child’s development.

“These principles of child led play need to be incorporated into everything we do in children’s centres, it’s about integrated working – that’s how we further children’s development”

Geraldine Connor CCM, Rowley Fields

For further information about Small Bodies Big Voices contact:

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