

The Power of Play

Project Report

November 2018



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The Power of Play – Project Background

At Turner Contemporary, we believe in the power of art to transform people and places, doing things differently to achieve our vision; “Art Made Essential – to be leaders in social and economic sustainability; vitally connecting art, people and place, at home and around the world.”

Since opening in 2011, Turner Contemporary has become one of the most successful galleries in the UK. We’ve achieved more than 2.9 million visits and the gallery has been a catalyst for the regeneration of Margate. Located in a building designed by David Chipperfield Architects, on a site overlooking the North Sea, our programme of world-class events, exhibitions of historical and contemporary art and our innovative learning programme have fast earned the gallery an international reputation. With free admission, great art is accessible for all.

Turner Contemporary is a charity governed by a Board of Trustees, chaired by Clive Stevens. The organisation receives revenue funding from Arts Council England and Kent County Council and the whole team works creatively to generate additional income.

Our Values

Our values ensure that we are delivering outstanding work and building an ambitious, rewarding culture. We are looking for people who adopt and exhibit these values in everything that they do.

Enterprising - We create value for ourselves, our community and our partners by being responsive to new opportunities; we encourage collaboration, creativity and initiative from our people

Welcoming – We’re friendly and warm, while maintaining professionalism of practice and behaviour; human empathy is key to how we think, internally and externally

Questioning – Our philosophy is one of investigation: being astute to audiences’ needs, unlocking understanding, provoking debate and asking tough questions – especially of ourselves

Context

Turner Contemporary is located in one of the most deprived districts in the UK with historically low cultural provision. The gallery's two neighbouring wards Margate Central and Cliftonville West have Lower Super Output areas (LSOAs) in the 0.1% of most deprived communities in the UK. 46.2% of children under 16 live in poverty in Margate Central and 41.6% in Cliftonville West, against a Kent average of 18.3% (Source: Index Multiple Deprivation 2010). Children living in areas of disadvantage are marginalised, with low educational attainment and low aspirations. Ofsted report that the children being let down by the education system are in deprived coastal towns, particularly down the East and South-East of England where there is poverty of expectation:

<http://bit.ly/1lvA8rR>.

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The benefit of engaging with our programme is evidenced in our [Social Value Research](#) (2016). The research shows that the gallery provides visitors with a stronger sense of connectedness to family and friends, empowers them, increases their self-belief; inspires and excites them and encourages them to be more active members of the community and their society. Residents of Margate and Thanet made up 22% of our visits in 2016/17, which is the highest percentage since the gallery opened, so we know our approach engages with underserved communities effectively. On average, 4% of our audiences have never been to an art gallery in their lives before.

Art Made Essential

We are committed to challenging traditional gallery practice to make ourselves more accessible; repositioning art as more relevant to society. Our distinctive, audience-focused approach is integral to our success and inspires interest from our peers, nationally and internationally. We have worked with a Philosopher in Residence since 2011, and have developed a culture of engaging audiences in conversation rather than telling people what to think about art. Over time we have grown more ambitious and pushed this methodology, working in partnership with audiences to commission new works, for example, <https://www.turnercontemporary.org/exhibitions/turner-contemporary-s-studio-group-commissionn>. In 2018 we will open a major exhibition curated by members of the community, and inspired by the fact that T.S. Eliot wrote part of *The Waste Land* in Margate <http://wasteland.onsocialengine.com/>. These projects incorporate the knowledge and insight of members of the local community at all stages of the curatorial process, enabling the sharing of skills between academic and non-academic researchers.

Turner Contemporary as a Centre for Children's Leadership through the Arts

We have extensive experience of supporting children in our community to lead change in their own town through the arts. For example, through *Art Inspiring Change* seventy 4 to 11 year olds transformed neglected sites in Margate, led ambitious events at Turner Contemporary and inspired their community to connect to the arts. Currently, we are launching a new project, with 60 primary school children commissioning a major artwork and interpretation for Ramsgate Harbour based on their research and community consultation as part of ACE and HLF's Great Place Scheme.

Children in their early years have huge potential for creativity and divergent thinking, as explored by Sir Ken Robinson in his RSA lecture *Changing Education Paradigms*². This gives us a significant opportunity to push our practice and develop expertise by working in partnership with pre-school children. This is the most vital time of our life in terms of our learning and development, and our first three years inform our future.

'Divergent thinking isn't a synonym but it's an essential capacity for creativity. It's the ability to see lots of possible answers to a question, lots of possible ways of interpreting

Turner Contemporary

a question, to think laterally, to think not just in linear or convergent ways, to see multiple answers, not one!’

As Robinson points out, research shows that 98% of pre-school children are ranked at ‘genius’ level at divergent thinking, but this capacity lessens rapidly as children grow older. Our work acknowledges that children have particular ways of seeing and of encountering the world that are mostly beyond the reach of adults. It creates a new model of audience engagement which is led by children.

A new partnership with Thanet Early Years Project (TEYP) inspired by Akram Zataari

The project was developed alongside the development of Akram Zaatari’s commission [*The Script*](#); based on Muslim societies and how - in a current international climate that can present a negative or even violent expression of Islam - one can identify new trends online of Muslims clearly portraying themselves in modest, human and loving contexts.

In a way that is highly relevant to our work with children, Akram is particularly interested in how children try to distract their fathers, uncles and grandfathers during prayer, changing usual power dynamics. This is often captured on video and posted on YouTube, for example [Father and son while praying](#).

The Power of Play took the theme of children and adults, and explored children’s leadership, culture and potential to inspire adults, producing a new partnership with the Thanet Early Years project <http://www.thanetearlyyears.org/>, reaching families who do not currently engage with the gallery and who live in areas of high disadvantage.

In the past, Turner Contemporary has worked with Thanet Early Year’s project as part of their Children in Need funded *Play and Learn Scheme* but their funding for this project was completely cut in 2017, leaving the Thanet Early Year’s project in a fragile situation. This new partnership enabled us to make a positive partnership which will enable us to test sustainable future collaborations.

The aims of *The Power of Play* were:

- To enable Turner Contemporary and TEYP to build a strong relationship, share learning and expertise, understand barriers to access and consider future collaborations, for example, providing a new crèche at the gallery site
- To reach children and parents/carers who would not otherwise have access to the arts or visit the gallery
- To build on our work to support children’s leadership inspired by the dynamic between children and adults in Akram Zataari’s work
- To enable children to inspire their adults to connect with the arts, and particularly contemporary art
- For children, supported by adults, to work with an artist at the gallery and inspire a new resource that can be used by other families who visit the gallery, and Akram’s work.

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- For this partnership to grow and develop into our next exhibition, *Seaside: Photographed*, and enable the children to inspire a new commission by an artist for that show.

Our approach to the project

Recruitment

The project was managed by Molly Molloy, Learning Officer at Turner Contemporary. The delivery team were Judith Brocklehurst – Artist, Tina Little – Playworker and Taylor Walters – Playworker. After a series of initial meetings with Tina Little, Manager at TEYP, and the Learning Team at Turner Contemporary, an open call was released for the project artist in May 2018.

Even at this initial stage of the project, rich discussions took place around the difference in terminology used by the gallery and TEYP. For example, there were discussions around the term ‘artist’, which TEYP saw as a threat to applications from creative early years practitioners who may not associate themselves with the word ‘artist’, seeing this as an elitist term which comes with formal education, for example. An example of a resolution: *Turner Contemporary is inviting applications from experienced and suitably qualified Artists, Facilitators and Early Years Educators to lead participation in The Power of Play a project exploring art and play with pre-school children and their families in Thanet, Kent.*

26 applications were received from artists and practitioners from around the UK. Six shortlisted applicants were invited to interview at Turner Contemporary on the 17th of July 2018. We interviewed a combination of local artists and those based further afield, with the idea that a local artist would be able to maintain connections with the group beyond the project. However, the London based artist Judith Brocklehurst really shone, and seemed to have the right mix of extensive experience and playful sensitivity which we were seeking. Play and playing with materials is at the core of her practice and she has worked in galleries, libraries, schools and hospitals in the past. Judith works to engage adults and children, providing the chance to develop multi layered open ended activities in which adults are often surprised by the ingenuity of their children.

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Planning and Collaboration



Judith's open-ended approach focussed on the use of everyday materials, and her own unique matrix used to design sessions and activities in a flexible way, centred around play. In August, the project delivery spent a 'Training and Practice Sharing' day together at the gallery to develop the project and a positive working relationship. This put everyone at ease and enabled the team to think about the use of space, evaluation and how to share and recruit for the project.

Producing the flyer was another initial key learning moment, as the gallery-sector widely used words such as 'workshop' 'immersive' and 'sensory' were removed due to feedback from the TEYP Playworkers that this would deter some families.

Focussed on a simple 'vocabulary' of materials, Judith had a brief framework for a plan which was decided with the playworkers during the Training and Practice Sharing Day. The same materials were used each week and were strictly 'everyday' products: things which can be found cheaply and are inexpensive and easy to purchase and recreate

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activities at home. This included cardboard, hosepipe, emergency blankets and gaffa tape.

'It gave time for us to get to know each other and to get a feel for the materials and find common ground: Process over end result, involvement of the parents, freedom to explore. We shared ways of interacting with participants: guiding or prompting in certain directions but being led by them.' Judith Brocklehurst



Recruitment

Flyers were designed by the project delivery team and distributed by hand to TEYP Nurseries and Creches in Thanet. Molly Molloy (Learning Officer, Turner Contemporary) visited the Creches at the beginning of the project which was a useful opportunity to meet parents. Due to the project timeline, and needing the sessions to finish at the point that Akram's exhibition opened – we recruited throughout the summer holidays. Feedback from the TEYP playworkers was that parents find it difficult to make it to new groups during the autumn term due to older children beginning school, and getting back into routines after the summer break. This point was proven as we had more parents who had signed up attending on later in the school term. As the Playworkers who were

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working on the project hadn't visited the gallery before, it was useful to have the training and practice sharing day with them.

Research and Evaluation

TEYP and Turner Contemporary staff created a short survey which was completed by each of the 10 parents. A summary of the findings is below.

- 50% of participants heard about the project through their playworker, 40% from the Flyer and 10% came with a friend
- 40% of Participants hadn't visited Turner Contemporary before
- 25% of participants hadn't visited an art gallery before
- 100% of participants attended other groups with their child
- 80% of participants wouldn't be able to attend the sessions if they were charged
- Participants age ranged from youngest of 4 months to oldest at 3 years old



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Schemas

Schemas are described as patterns of repeated behaviour which allow children to explore and express developing ideas and thoughts through their play and exploration. The repetitive actions of schematic play allow children to construct meaning in what they are doing.

For this purpose, the TEYP workers focused on schema in their weekly observations to align with the evaluation which takes place in their setting. Observations were noted during the sessions and shared at the end of each day. We identified 9 key schema to work with during the 6 sessions as demonstrated below with images.

Each child is different, and some may display more than one schema while others show none at all. Schemas can be observed, identified and understood by early years practitioners and parents give a better awareness of each child's current interests and ways of thinking, they are a clear way to identify the power of learning through play.

Below is a list of the schemas identified in sessions with accompanying images.

- **1: Trajectory** - creating lines in space by climbing up and jumping down. Dropping items from up high, experimenting with gravity and weight. The child in the photograph was immersed in this activity for around 5 minutes. Placing ping pong balls into the cardboard tube ramp and watching them come out again.



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'I hoped that there would be freedom for the playworkers to actually play and have fun which was successful. Taylor making all the ping pong balls fly off the netting for example.' Judith Brocklehurst

- **2: Positioning** - lining items up and putting them in groups, sharing and placing objects onto others. This child was experimenting with sound, positioning the silver tube on her mothers and sisters ear.
- **3: Transforming** - exploring the changing states of materials, transforming them from a solid to liquid state and back again, light to dark. Loud to quiet. In this case, transforming the tube into a communication device and a ball.



- **4: Enveloping** - covering themselves or objects completely. Wrapping items up or placing them in containers. Exploring light and dark. The emergency blankets were placed together to make a huge 'parachute' as the playworkers noticed the

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children trying to cover themselves in the shiny material. This was a popular activity which the older children asked to be repeated week on week. The playworkers observed that this is an activity they expect in a TEYP session outside but the parachutes they use cost around £100. This simple and cheap alternative meant that the parents could provide this activity in the home environment too.

'Children were able to explore freely and independently with no agenda but their own' – Tina, Playworker



- **5: Transporting** - carrying or moving items from one place to another; carrying items in containers or bags. The child below spent a long time with the silver tubes, experimenting with the ways it moved along the floor and expanded as he moved.

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'The work shop showed that there is not always a need for an end product, the process and experience is a great learning opportunity for both parent and child.'
Taylor, Playworker

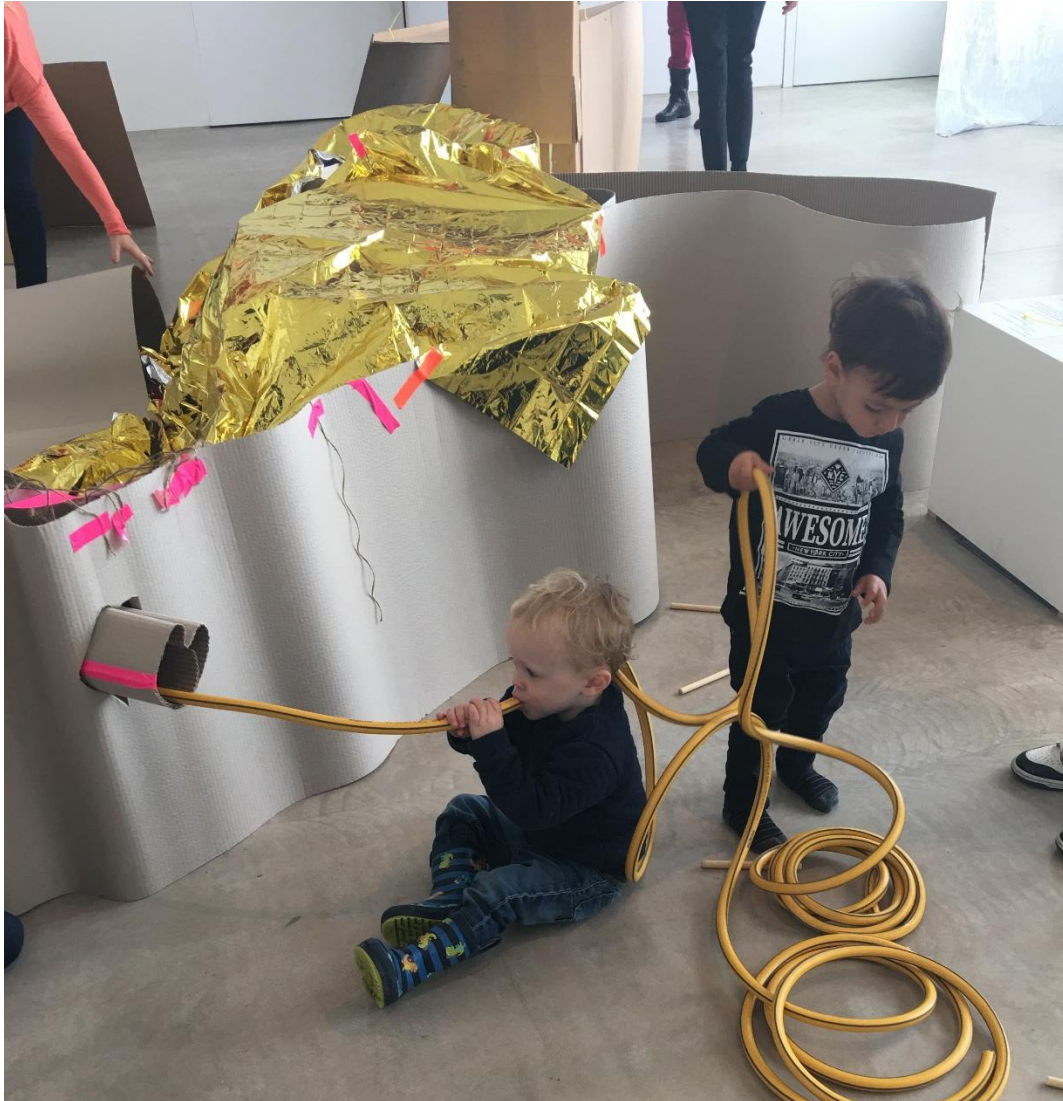


- **6: Orienteering** – an interest in positioning themselves or objects in different places or positions e.g. upside down or on their side.

'I can see the benefit of recycling resources to use again and again either in a similar way or completely differently.' Taylor, Playworker

- **7: Connecting** - setting out and dismantling, constructing, joining items together with tape or glue, as seen above.

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- **8: Acoustics** Communication before speech including transmitting messages or feeling one's own power through the ability to make loud noises with materials.

'Although there weren't any materials that looked like something you'd communicate with like a phone, the children used their imaginations to create their own ways of making sounds and communications with each other using cups and hosing pipes. The rustling of the emergency blankets also held the attention of the smaller babies for a long time' Tina – Playworker

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- **9: Trajectory:** Running through mazes, creating tracks for cars to run along. This child was moving through the space with his toy car, then running it down a cardboard tube and then coming out of the maze to collect it.



'The chance to hide from adults - always good!' - Judith Brocklehurst

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Delivery

The room was set up with materials to make various mazes and environments. Led by the children, as participants arrived they worked with Judith on the floor to create their own spaces using the materials provided. Playworkers were on hand to edit and help create the visions of the young people. The spaces quickly transformed to castles, race tracks and secret dens. Each week, a few more materials were added, including microphones, Ping-Pong balls, netting, hosepipes, cardboard tubes and a greenscreen.

Materials

'I think the range of materials worked well. The plan of having the same materials that could be used in different ways could have been pushed further, on the other hand it was good to be open and bring in new suggested materials like the netting and ping pong balls. It was a great suggestion from Tina, to keep everything so that even bits of tape got brought back in and were used in a different way in the following session

I realised that keeping it simple was key. Simple activities and materials can be the most captivating. The simplicity allows freedom to do new things with the materials and be inventive. Getting a balance between repetition and change was also important, introducing the same materials with a new theme prompted participants to take more ownership over what they did with them. – Judith Brocklehurst

Themes

Some of the themed sessions worked better than others. This partially depended on the participants and what they chose to get involved with. The options were always there and were then sometimes taken up in following sessions.

'The tech side of exploring sound didn't work so well because of the age group. It worked in its analogue form with the hose pipe, ducting and cup telephone being used a lot. Dressing up also didn't catch on when first introduced because of the preferences of the participants but came back in the final session. The way the building activity evolved to incorporate light and sound was something I will definitely take further' - Judith Brocklehurst

Session number and Date	Theme/ Brief Description	Participants
Session 1 21 st September	BUILDING Getting to know each other, Visit the gallery Play with the materials Building our own play environment. (film these environments)	7 Adults 6 Children
Session 2 28 th September	CLOTHING Making something that can be worn or moved about in. We might start by building environments first and then turn them into clothes/hats/ capes/masks that can be worn in these structures.	8 Adults 9 Children

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	(film and record the sounds of moving in the clothing)	
Session 3 5 th October	SOUND Exploring what noise our materials make, amplifying them with contact microphones. (Record some of these sounds to use for next week)	9 Adults 10 Children
Session 4 12 th October	MOVEMENT Using sounds from last session to make up dances or movement and maybe build environments to lead us on a dance. (film movement)	8 Adults 10 Children
Session 5 19 th October	PLAY Combining elements of the previous activities Activity in the gallery- while we watch Akram's video. Possibly use of green screen.	8 Adults 9 Children
Session 6 26 th October	SHARE Rolling it out ...Celebration parade movement through the gallery (including watching/interacting with films from the previous sessions)	13 Adults 15 Children



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Responses

Positive Observations

- Parents and children joined in and did unexpected things – hugging, playing with others, letting go.
- Children who don't normally like being in a group began to work alongside others.
- Attention spans were impressive.
- Lots of parents said they would use simple ideas at home: den building, black torches, string telephones.
- The set up worked when we had small and larger groups and very young and older kids.
- We didn't have to say no ... (only to green stickers on the floor).
- The wider aim to get people into the gallery who might not otherwise come was met. Hopefully people will come back now they know the place and what might be on offer to them.

Challenges

- Initial recruitment of participants
- Some parents found it difficult to let or get their children to engage, sometimes this was due to tiredness or clinginess.
- Down side of tech which was a distraction for staff who could have used this time to work with participants

'What I learnt'

'I really enjoyed working with Judith. I wasn't sure how it would work with an artist and no concrete plan, but it was great to see the families working together and some of the children really taking the lead and using the materials in different ways which we wouldn't have thought of. It was great to have fun with the simple materials we'll definitely be using these at nursery especially the space blankets!' Tina Little-Playworker

'I learnt a lot through the collaboration with the play workers Taylor and Tina, especially in regard to playing with babies, using lights and mirrors, to encourage movement. Often engaging the parents in activities offered a way of getting the kids involved. But it also gave the kids freedom to go away from their parents and get involved in something else.'

'If I did a similar workshop again I would attempt to make the set up sparser, so nothing was set up and evolved in different ways each time. In this situation this might have inhibited some participants. I would also try and integrate all the themes into the building activity, which did almost happen by accident.' Judith Brocklehurst

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Legacy

All parents were given a 'CT9' Card at the end of the project which enables them to enter Turner Contemporary's weekly family activities for free. All parents asked for their details to be kept for our upcoming commission for *Seaside: Photographed* in which we will recruit an artist who will produce a new work in collaboration with, for and inspired by families in collaboration with TEYP. The commission will explore the coast from young children's viewpoints and bring new perspectives to *Seaside: Photographed*; a major exhibition which will examine the relationship between photographers, photography and the British seaside from the 1850s to the present.

The resource designed by Judith for the sessions will be available for families with young children to use for each exhibition. We have also planned a session in which TEYP workers will train our Learning Delivery Team to use the resources and some simple tools to use specifically with participants who are under four years old, in January 2019.

¹. Course participant, Creative Enablers, A course for parents and carers led by Turner Contemporary 2016/17

²<https://www.thersa.org/discover/videos/rsa-animate/2010/10/rsa-animate---changing-paradigms>

All photos taken within sessions by Molly Molloy – please contact Turner Contemporary if you intend to reuse or publish these images mrmolloy@turnercontemporary.org