



The Creative Skills Podcast

Episode 1: Creativity, Vulnerability and Human Connection, with Bex Carter

Transcript

Quick Links:

- Creative Skills Online: www.starcatchers.org.uk/creative-skills-online
- This podcast episode: <https://www.starcatchers.org.uk/episode1/>
- Edinburgh Early Years Podcast: <https://soundcloud.com/user-227479287-28906765/early-years-podcast-november>

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Transcript

Heather Armstrong (00:17):

Welcome to Starcatchers Creative Skills Online. I'm Heather Armstrong.

The late Ken Robinson was a brilliant advocate for creativity in education and the idea that everyone is born creative. And we are born creative - you can see it in the way babies first start to learn about the world. They explore, they experiment, they fail. Sometimes they fail hundreds of times before they get to where they want to be; whether that's a first word or a first step, or sometimes the first time they scribble all over your sofa.

But if we all recognise that we're born creative - it's also important to recognise that sometimes we don't always feel creative. What do we do about that?

Since 2013, it's been my job to help the Early Learning and Childcare Workforce in Scotland feel and be more creative. And now I have a brand-new creative challenge of my own - how do you take a training programme that is rooted so deeply in practical skills and human connection and deliver it online? We have the artists, we have the ideas - we have the technology! All we need now is you. So, I hope you stick around.

In this first podcast, I'm going to cover the basics: who Starcatchers are, what creativity is and why it's important, and how it all links to the Early Learning and Childcare sector in Scotland. And I'm also going to be chatting to Rebecca Carter from Edinburgh City Council, because for me, creativity is always a collaborative process. This podcast isn't about giving you all the answers, but I hope it's a start of some really interesting conversations.

For those of you who are new to Starcatchers, we are Scotland's arts and early years organisation, and we specialise in exploring creative activity for babies, toddlers, and young children AND the adults who care for them. Since 2013, we've been funded by the Scottish government to deliver the Creative Skills programme. And I've been lucky enough to head up a team of amazing early years artists who have been delivering practical, inspiring training for the workforce in Scotland. I'm delighted to say those artists will be joining me in future podcasts to talk about their practice.

Creativity is mentioned in every early years policy in Scotland, but we can sometimes find ourselves in a weird situation where, on a practical level, everyone doesn't always know exactly what creativity looks like - or what it feels like. And not everyone has the practical skills to bring more creativity into their practice.

But let's start at the basics: what is creativity? It's really important to be upfront and say, the expressive arts and creativity are not always the same thing. Reproduction is not creativity. Following step-by-step instructions - sorry - it's not a creative process!

As an arts organisation, Starcatchers champions the expressive arts as brilliant catalyst for creativity, but it's important to recognize that creativity is so much broader. Education Scotland has a brilliant and very thorough definition of creativity, and you'll find it on the Reflective Practice Worksheet that goes with this podcast.¹

But when you get right down to the bare bones of it: I talk about creativity as being the process where you take two things - objects, thoughts, materials, whatever - you take two things and you combine them in a way that's new to you. And it has to be in a way that you care about. So, you could be writing a sonnet, or you could be using the contents of your handbag to jimmy a lock because you got stuck in the toilet. The important thing is the *process* - two things together, put them together in a way that's new to you, and that you care about. It's a process that often involves a lot of exploring, a lot of trial and error, and to be properly engaged in a creative process, you need to be open to getting it wrong sometimes.

But *through* those creative processes, through learning from those mistakes, we learn to be resilient. We learn to find different solutions to the same problem. The expressive arts just give us a really safe, fun space to be able to explore those ideas and build those skills.

I like the analogy of creativity being like a muscle, right? So, we're all born with muscles. If you work out every day, then your muscles will develop. You know, you'll get buff and strong. If you don't always get those opportunities, what happens to those muscles when don't use them? You know they atrophy, they waste away. And when you suddenly find you do need to use those muscles, it can feel impossible. Being asked to be creative can feel really vulnerable.

I think it's also important to recognise that if we don't always feel creative, some of the children we work with, don't always feel creative too. The sad fact is some wee ones, they just don't have the same opportunities to explore and develop their creativity - so the first time they come face to face with open-ended materials like building blocks, you just get a blank face. Some wee ones get stressed about messy play. And I hate to say it but some children just don't automatically get why it's so fantastic to be outside.

The reason I'm saying this now is because I knew all these experiences are incredibly important, but a big part of creative practice in early years is beginning where the child does where their interests are what helps them feel safe, and then crucially helping them grow from there. That's how you support children to develop their own creativity.

Children absolutely need time and space to play and explore, but they also need inspiration. They need playful creative adults in their lives. The Growing Up in Scotland study found that one of the biggest predictors of cognitive development in under 5s was home learning - and they cite "sharing stories, drawing together, singing and rhymes" as important aspects of a high-quality home learning environment. And they've proven that when it comes to the attainment gap, these shared creative experiences help protect against the negative effects of poverty. Shared creativity helps

¹ <https://www.starcatchers.org.uk/episode1>

develop our baby's brains, it helps develop vocabulary, and that helps tackle inequality. It's really important to say up front that I'm not here to judge anyone's parenting and I'm not here to judge anyone's practice. We've all had it on experiences that brought us to this point, and creativity can feel like a really personal thing.

However, it is my job to look at the lives of young children and ask, how can we make their experiences more creative? How can we give them more opportunities to make decisions, to express themselves and to develop a sense of agency in their own lives? How can we help foster that curiosity and build those creative muscles that they'll use their whole lives? The answer lies with you.

The Creative Skills programme has always been about giving the ELC workforce the opportunity to develop those creative muscles - so you can then offer more creative opportunities to the wee ones you work with. So, for you to build your own creative muscles, you need to push yourself out your comfort zone a wee bit. You need to explore new ideas and you need to be open to the idea that some things will work straight away and some things won't.

We can't get you all on the same room right now, but we can share ideas with you through these podcasts and supporting materials you'll find on the Starcatcher's website. And we can offer the opportunities for you to get together and talk about your creativity as it develops.

Each podcast comes with its own Reflective Practice Worksheet. You can work through it on your own, or you can use it as a guide to start having more creative conversations with your colleagues - and I really hope you do. It's not enough to have one arty person in a setting, you know? The expressive arts and creativity are central to the curriculum, and they're a key part of working in early years. We need everyone to be thinking more creatively, especially now.

The good news is we don't need to do this all by ourselves - to use a great West coast expression we've got hauners! Today, I'm joined by Bex Carter, an Early Years Quality improvement officer for Edinburgh City Council.

[music break]

We are now recording this a couple of weeks after term has started back - just as a bit of understatement, a lot has changed since then!

Bex Carter (07:45):

[laughs] It's a whole new world!

Heather Armstrong (07:48):

Yeah! I really want to kick off by saying - how's everybody doing?

Bex Carter (07:50):

So I think now that we're back, there's... When you're with kids, it's just a totally different

experience, isn't it? Your heads with the kids. And although there's a huge amount of stuff going on behind the scenes, actually I think people are just incredibly grateful and feeling the joy of being back, interacting with children and doing what they love!

There's a lot of stuff that - the things going on behind the scenes - there's so much that we've got to think about in terms of health and safety and reducing the spread of COVID and kind of a little bit more structure maybe to the day, then we would have been kind of advocating [for] previously. But I think folk are doing amazingly. Certainly from the things I've seen, our kids are just so delighted to be back in their wee communities with the people that they love and their friends, and it's really heartening to see.

Do you know, it reminds you why you're doing what you doing? Cause we got lost in paperwork and worry and stuff over - I did anyway - over the summer. But it's just nice to be back with humans!

Heather Armstrong (08:52):

Oh, that's so lovely to hear! And speaking from someone who is still working from a sofa... Kind of jealous!

Bex Carter (09:00):

Well, sadly I'm not back out there much because we are still not classed as essential visits yet. But I too have the jealousy of - just thinking "I just want to interact with wee humans!"

Heather Armstrong (09:14):

Yeah, absolutely. I must admit... I mean, it's got to be like more than a thousand early years practitioners I've worked with in the last kind of six or seven years. And I think the more you talk to the workforce well, for me anyway, the more I talk to the workforce, kind of the more protective I feel of them? So, I had this real sense, you know, as term is kind of starting back - I mean, I was exhausted, everyone was exhausted [just] starting term - and I just thought: "Oh, Oh, I hope everyone's all right!"

And I must... I do think that, you know, part of my kind of drive for Creative Skills this year and keeping it going online is to try and kinda help make things a bit easier for people? That's my aim. It's like... Yeah, it's very much that: "Okay, so actually what can we do to help, you know" - [as] Starcatchers - "what can we do to make things better"?

Just when you were talking about COVID restrictions, do you worry that the restrictions may be getting in the way of some practitioners feeling that they can still be creative in their practice?

Bex Carter (10:09):

That's a really interesting question. I think to start off with our - like you're saying - our workforce is brilliant. You know, we have such committed and passionate individuals working with our most important wee people that you can't really kind of take that away from anyone.

I think the COVID restrictions, there's always that uncertainty, isn't it? Cause it's new, we're all finding our way. The guidance kind of keeps shifting a little bit. So, it's a bit more tricky to find the sort of solid ground to start building on. But I think we're getting there.

I mean, there's kind of structure in place that we have been advocating kind of removing. So, you know, we're having to do really scheduled things like frequent washing of hands, that kind of stuff - specific how you're doing your snacks. So, there are, there are restrictions around about practice that we haven't had before, but there are really important health and safety reasons for that.

So, in some respects, yes, unnecessarily, but in other respects, I think what it does do - and I think this is where Starcatchers is really important - is to start thinking about: "Right. So, we know these are the confines. We know these are the constraints we've got within that little where are the opportunities?" You know, what aspects of creative practice that were happening before that were really good practice? Can we encourage and develop? And, you know, now we've got these things - what opportunities does it bring? Cause we are with, you know... Your... Because of the bubbles, for example, where you're with a smaller groups of kids, but that in itself can be a positive and it can present challenges. So, it's just sort of walking that tightrope through.

Heather Armstrong (11:47):

Yeah. And I think it is that thing of, you know, once everyone's had a few weeks to kind of settle in and get their heads around these new regulations - and you're obviously... You're absolutely right, that the new measures that are being brought in are so important - and you know that's obviously... It has to be kind of like front and centre, but I think once the dust settles a wee bit there are really interesting conversations to be, had to say "well actually what is possible?", you know, "what can we do? Are there new things that are going to come up?" And that's going to part of that kind of wider creative thinking, isn't it?

Bex Carter (12:16):

Definitely.

Heather Armstrong (12:17):

Yeah. I'm hoping that the ideas that our artists are going to be sharing over the next few months are going to help start those conversations and get people thinking like: "Oh, actually, maybe we could do that outside in a way that you never thought before" or, you know, "maybe we don't need as many materials to do this thing" or, you know, or "the materials we do are kind of changing". It's very much an evolving kind of conversation isn't it?

Bex Carter (12:37):

Absolutely. And I think also it highlights the difference between creativity and expressive arts, quite starkly, because we're not talking about a specific way of doing a thing. This is like, actually, we need to be creative in our thinking *across* the piste. So here's what, here's what we can, we know we have to [do], but within that, you know, if we just turn that upside down and if we do this, what happens?

It's that exploration and it's that I think part of what our job will be is to be able to say, "right, here's who have the confidence to do this - don't touch that don't touch that bit, it's got to stay - but these bits you can, you can manipulate and explore" - and, and share with your kids as well. Cause I think one of the things that is a really - again, it's that tightrope to walk, isn't it - we've been talking so much about empowering kids and agency and kids leading their own learning, and necessarily we've had to remove some of that for the minute while we get our heads around what's happening.

So, I think it's really important that we keep that aspiration front and centre. It's almost like that North star, you know - we want to get over there, right, there's a big old hump in the way, but how are we going to get round? Under, through, jump, bounce? Like how can we get there?

Heather Armstrong (13:56):

Absolutely. I love that you brought up the separation or the distinction between creativity and the expressive arts, obviously as an arts organisation, expressive arts is our vehicle, but I've always been really clear right from the very beginning that absolutely creativity is much broader than that. We use the expressive arts as a catalyst for that because we think - I think a lot of people think - it's a really good medium to kind of, to start those, those kind of creative processes.

But, you know, I know when I've been writing resources over the summer, we've been sharing Wee Inspirations it's trying to get across - I hope I've done it! - trying to get across that idea that, you know, although this is the expressive arts idea that you're starting with it's the creativity behind it that's important.

So, you know, this is how it might begin, but then it *has* to be about the wee ones. It has to be about them. Where do they want to take it? You know, what inspires them? And always, if they're not into it, it's fine!

Bex Carter (14:53):

Yeah, totally!

Heather Armstrong (14:54):

You know? Let it go! We can think about something else!

I think that's one of the things that I'm probably most nervous about, about having Creative Skills Online, rather than in person, is because when you're in person and you can work through all these practical ideas together and see what it works and see when it doesn't and reassure each other, and go "actually, that's alright!"

And I think the reflective practice as well, I'm really gonna miss it - we are going to hopefully do it other ways I should say! - but being able to bring people together and say, "well, actually I tried that, but it didn't work the way I thought".

I think it's one thing hearing from artists - and our artists that absolutely fantastic, I'm so proud of

them and they're so creative and so inspiring - but I think there's something really special about hearing from other practitioners as well and saying "well actually how does it work in the real world?" when you *actually* did this idea with wee ones how did it work? Who did what? And there will be outcomes that people could never have predicted, you know, which are wonderful!

Bex Carter (15:51):

But that's why we work with kids and other practitioners, isn't it? It's because that bit is the joyful part.

Heather Armstrong (15:59):

Yeah!

Bex Carter (16:00):

It's that exploration and that discovery together. I'm totally with you - I think one of the really important things that we're wrestling with as a central team as well is: "Right. So, we know that the most successful way to share good practice and to empower the practitioners that we've got is, is about like [saying] 'Don't listen to us! Like here's a bit of... here's an idea. Here's a bit of a catalyst. What does that mean in your setting? What does that mean with your vision values and aims? How does that fit into your practice as a person?'".

Because one of the real things I think is a real privilege of working in early years - and across the board with young people - is that it's so much connected to *you* as a person it's so much deeply rooted in you and your kind of the human connection.

That's the bit that sparks joy. It's that discovery - it's that - I really am so invested in the young people that I work with and I get joy when they do something that they're really proud of. Do you know? So, it's that co-construction and that community that I think is what drives most of our workforce, you know? That's the joy.

And it's really hard to do that through Zoom! [laughs] I mean...other platforms are available.

Heather Armstrong (17:17):

[laughs]

Bex Carter (17:18):

I should say, we're doing this through Zoom on my *personal* device! Edinburgh City Council does not use Zoom.

Heather Armstrong (17:25):

I love the fact you keep using the word "joy" as well, because for me, that's absolutely central to what we need to be doing. And if nothing else, if bringing more creativity into practice gives both children and the practitioner is more joy then oh my goodness, isn't it worth it?

Bex Carter (17:42):

Absolutely. Yeah. And it's also just about that kind of shared human experience, right? And I think that's why creativity for me is so central because what separates us from other animals is that we have this capacity for reflective thought and we have this problem-solving and we, you know, we can, we can communicate that and we can share that and we can build it together and that is essentially right there as to what it is at the core of being human.

I think that - we were talking about the kind of wider context - one of the things I love about the updated *Realising the Ambition* is the subtitle "*Being Me*". It's all about that. It's all about just what it is to be a human and to be connected and to be part of community and to be seen for you as an individual, not somewhere on a continuum, not somewhere external matrix of what a child looks like or what a six-year-old looks like, or you know, 24-year-olds. It's that individual "being me" thing.

Heather Armstrong (18:44):

Yeah, absolutely.

I know before the summer, when we were chatting, you were talking about Edinburgh having a particular focus on creativity this year. Is that still happening?

Bex Carter (18:52):

We are looking at our strategic focus to make sure that whatever we do is supporting practice with the - kind of obviously the changes - with increased expectations. I think that it about... I think it's central, right? I do think that actually, whatever we do, we need to empower our practitioners to be able to be creative in their practice.

And I actually think that's going to be one of the real key drivers for success at the moment, because we are going to have to think creatively across the piste. And we're also going to have to do that kind of shared negotiation - which is part of that creative process - with our families, with our kids and with other practitioners in the setting. So, it might not look exactly how we thought it was going to look in terms of how we take it forward. But I do think it's going to be central to our approach coming up!

Heather Armstrong (19:41):

That's really good to hear. It's good to hear that it's still on the radar, I think, you know, I'm sure a lot of people absolutely wouldn't blame you if it was "we just need to get all that hands washed!"

Bex Carter (19:52):

I mean, there's that too, right? But also, there's creative ways of doing it! So, somebody was telling me a story - that one of the problems that they'd had in terms of the hand-washing was that perpetual queue. And one of the kids started singing and she was like: "Aha! Once they've got the soap in their hand, they can just skip and sing while they wash their hands!" and then they come back round to the sink and you're like... I mean that right there is creative thinking! It's creative

problem-solving *and* it's joyful!

You've turned something, which is a necessity, and a havetae - for all incredibly important and good reasons - but through a bit of creative and negotiation and seeing what your kids are doing and responding to the kids, then it turns into something joyful and fun! I can imagine a line of twenty kids skipping around the room, doing their soap, having a bit of a sing, and then not being the same experience for them as standing in a queue static while they wait.

Heather Armstrong (20:49):

It really highlights what are transferable skill creativity thinking is, isn't it? It's being able to look at a problem and not just you being able to find solutions, but to be able to work with the children creatively because it's sometimes *they* may have the solution!

Bex Carter (21:04):

Aw, totally. And I think that's the other thing for me - when I get overwhelmed with things, my initial reaction is to pull things in tight, right? I've got this, I've got this, I've got this, you know, lists come out, tick boxes come out and it's like tightening it down. So I'm not looking necessarily outwards until I stop and reflect and go: "Do you know what? Actually, I know this makes me feel better in the moment, but what I need to do is to start looking outwards and to just be, you know, prioritise where are the things that I've got to do and actually who can support me and who can and I support?"

So, it is having the confidence - and the time and the space - to be able to reflect and look outwards for creative solutions as well as just trying to get through and meet the challenges that you have each day.

Heather Armstrong (21:50):

Yep. The other thing I'm quite excited is as we've been working on more resources over the summer, we've got more resources that we can share with families. And I know you mentioned families just briefly before - but are we still really trying to support that home learning and moving between what's happening in the setting and what's happening at home?

Bex Carter (22:11):

Absolutely. And I think what our experience was during the lockdown was that we've got to work incredibly well together because it is a holistic picture, right? So, when kids were not receiving input from the setting physically, how else can we do that? That relationship and the trust between families and settings is really important.

And we've seen examples across the country of now, you know, individual settings are going into isolation for a period of time or a wee bubble. So actually, being creative around how we keep those relationships going, but also how we support and using things like the, Wee Inspirations, how do we support experiences and things that whole families can do together so that they know that it's linking in.

There's also sometimes that worry that children are "missing" learning, particularly if you're talking about your pre-school year, you know, so how do we, how do we make sure that parents and carers feel confident that actually just them being in the moment with their kids doing something like that is the best thing that they could possibly be doing? You know, it isn't about sitting down and tracing the letter of your name or whatever - it's about that human experience together. It's about that co-creation, it's about that joyful experience wherever you are.

Heather Armstrong (23:33):

Yeah, absolutely. And I think the other thing that I'm hoping that families are really gonna appreciate as a little bit of that insight into what actually happens in settings? [laughs] I think that can sometimes be that, you know, that wall of silence!

Bex Carter (23:46):

Yeah, yeah!

Heather Armstrong (23:47):

Where if you ask what happens they're [your kids] just like "nothing." And it's like, really?! You were there for six hours?! What happened? Really nothing?

I think often, it's only when you start engaging with, you know, expressive arts or creative play with wee ones that you do start to get more information. You do start to get more chat about their day - and if it's something that they recognise from being in nursery or, you know, in the other ELC setting, and there could be some really lovely conversations that come out of that as well.

So I think you're right. I mean, I think kind of local lockdowns and people being isolated for - hopefully very short periods of time and it's not going to get worse again - but I think we do need to have a kind of weather eye on that. And hopefully this will help kind of strengthen that.

I mean, home learning is something that we've been trying to strengthen for years anyway, isn't it? In terms of those kind of links with home.

Bex Carter (24:38)

Yeah, I think that we need to think carefully about how we describe it as well, because when you talk about - not you, when "one" talks about home learning - there's an unspoken subtext to that, which is what you're doing at home is not learning.

What I think we need to do, first of all, is just to say: "Do you know what? See, when you're just having a chat with your kid, your kid is soaking up so much stuff and that is the key. That is core learning. That is what we want to explore and build on."

It was funny what you were talking about in terms of the links between what happens in the setting and what happens at home. Cause I was thinking about one of the sessions that I came and joined with the Creative Skills [live sessions in Edinburgh] where we were exploring a play village with Hazel. Hazel's one of the fabulous artists who did some work with us in terms of getting into

role play and exploring and sharing and that particular experience was we were sitting and we, we created a village.

We were able to use stuff that we had around us. We all had our characters and we were just entering into roleplay and interacting with each other in that space. And man, that was hard to start with! I'm obviously early years, I've been kind of steeped in this approach for ages, but actually doing it with other adults and not feeling like a twit was that took a bit of a go first off!

And it made me reflect on times where I've maybe been playing with my own son and I hadn't been as... I'd had like other structures on top of stuff rather than just being in the moment with my son.

So, I think there's... it's that continuum of confidence and their capacity to just let go and be in the moment that I think is also really interesting to explore. Cause that all links into the kind of feelings of control that all links into co-creation and the relationships that you have with the people that you being creative with. So, it's yeah, there's a whole host of stuff to unpick, which will be interesting.

Heather Armstrong (26:48):

Yeah. I mean, I do always say that the advantage of that challenge of trying to be genuinely creative and in the moment with other adults, you know, the big advantage of that being quite difficult is, you know, you're pushing your comfort zone, you're trying new things. But it also means when you go back and you try something with young children, it's so much easier!

Both (27:13):

[laugh]

Heather Armstrong (27:18):

You know, whether it is about training in the same room together, or, you know later on this year we're going to be doing lives Zoom sessions where we will be going through practical ideas with artists and I'm under no illusion that will be difficult. This is a huge learning curve for all of us! But, oh my goodness, if you can do it in a Zoom session with a bunch of strangers it's going to be easy-peasy when you get back to, you know, what you're used to.

I'm feeling confident about it. I think it's going to be a good challenge for everybody.

Bex Carter (27:47):

Yeah. The good thing about it though is I think everybody wants this to succeed, right? So, everybody's like, - here are our new parameters, we know we've got to be creative around about how we interact, collaborate, explore - but we all want to.

Heather Armstrong (28:03)

There's a lot of good will, which I think goes a long way, doesn't it?

Bex Carter (28:05)

Yes, definitely. Yep.

Heather Armstrong (28:07):

Now Bex, I know you've got your own podcast. Do you want to plug it?

Bex Carter (28:12)

I do indeed! Actually, probably a bit of context around about how this came up would be great.

So nearly a year and a half ago now, my colleague and I were doing a bit of work with some of our practitioners across the city around about developing collaboration and around the improving or increasing practitioner voice.

So, one of the things that came out of that was actually - there's a whole host of stuff out there, but you know, there's time pressures, there's also that kind of [issue of] well, maybe it doesn't fit into the strategic picture of the setting that I'm in. And also, just how do you find the stuff sometimes, you know? Like Edu Twitter's great [but] if you're not on Twitter, then you can miss some stuff. But also, there's so much, how do you know what's good?

And a couple of the practitioners came up and were like, do you know what would be really good – a wee podcast so that we could listen to it and then use that as a springboard to have chats with our colleagues.

Because the other thing that we know is it's about that collaboration again, regardless of what you do. And if you sit and read a book that's cracking, but you'll get way more out of it if you read that and *then* go and have a chat with somebody else, who's read it and hear what they took from it and start to, again, co-construct negotiate, be creative around what you've heard or read.

So, we started doing a podcast. The first few episodes were kind of exploring more central local stuff around Edinburgh and then *Realising the Ambition* came out. And I was like, do you know what? I'm just going to fire off a wee email. So it was like [excited voice] “Hi guys, I know you wrote it, do you want to speak to me?”

And then Lynn Taylor and Marion Burns were brilliant were like “Yeah, great!” So, the last six episodes are conversations with the authors of *Realising the Ambition* including the Ed Psych from Highlands, James [McTaggart], who was part of the team as well.

So they [the conversations] are, I think really interesting cause it was about finding a bit more about the thinking behind things that were going on. And again, just wee questions because what *Realising the Ambition* looks like for each setting will be different because it depends on your context. It depends on the people that you have in your setting. It depends on, you know, what your particular community needs.

And if you have a really good understanding of where it comes from that really, hopefully, will enable the setting, will enable folk to be able to engage with it and use it in the best possible way. So, they're out there, they're on iTunes, it's "Edinburgh Early Years".

Heather (30:50)

Excellent. I'll make sure we'll share a link to that as well.

Bex Carter (30:52)

Thanks very much.

Heather Armstrong (30:55):

It's such a great document, isn't it - *Realising the Ambition?*

Bex Carter (30:59):

I love it so much!

Heather Armstrong (31:03):

It very much supports that kind of creativity and collaboration that we've been talking about it, doesn't it?

Bex Carter (31:08):

Yeah. You know, and one of the things I really, really love about it is the fact that we're starting to make explicit links with different theories of early years. It's Reggio... there's Froebel... Vygostsky - there's a whole host of stuff in there and everybody's got their own kind of pedagogical home. None of them are at odds with each other particularly, but it just, again, depends because it's so personal, your practice is so personal, it depends on you and your own experiences growing up.

But I think being able to be explicit about what drives you, I think being able to be explicit about your values, your beliefs, and then your "why" - like, what is it that I believe about children? What is it that I believe about, you know, practice? And then using that as a way to have really important conversations with your colleagues, because sometimes it's difficult working in a big team, and because your practice is so entrenched in you as a person, if somebody does something a little bit differently to you, unless you understand why, it can be really nippy!

[laughs]

D'you know? So, gives you a wee insight into what's happening. Cause you'll actually [think] "oh I get, I get why that's happening now and I can see how that's linked to the same North star, just a different path to get there!"

Heather Armstrong (32:27):

Yeah, and it is really interesting looking how you can all come to the same conclusion, but you're looking through different lenses - and it's not the ones kind of right or wrong. It's just being able to have that empathy with each other, isn't it?

Bex Carter (32:40):

I love the word: "empathy". I think that's so important. And I think it's all... It comes back to human connection all the time, doesn't it? It comes back to those relationships. It comes back to respecting each other as humans and then building on that, regardless of whether you're talking about speaking with a peer or speaking with families or working with kids, you know, that's the core for me.

Heather Armstrong (33:00)

Aww, lovely. Listen, it has been so lovely to speak to you. It's always so important, I think, to reach out to people who are working in education - we don't want to be in our kind of arts bubble and think "oh this is a great idea!". It's so important for us that we can keep our partnerships going and talk to people who are on the ground in the trenches - even if that's virtually at the moment - and really make sure that, whatever we're offering *is* going to be useful, relevant, helpful and make things better.

Bex Carter (33:36):

That's again cause we're all for the North Star. It's the same North Star and we all just want to get there and support other folk to get in the same place.

Heather Armstrong (33:45)

Fantastic.

Bex Carter (33:46)

I've loved having a chat. Heather, thank you. And I would... I don't know who's gonna be listening to this - but the Creative Skills package that you put together for Edinburgh City was fantastic and really worthwhile in terms of the feedback we got from our practitioners and also, I loved it too! I really think that's the stuff we need and that's the stuff that will improve our experiences for our kids.

Heather Armstrong (34:10)

Well, thank you so much. It's always lovely to hear. I think if we can bring some of that inspiration, some of those practical ideas - but crucially, it really has to be about kind of bringing the workforce together as well - so I think if we can do at least part of that online this year, then I'm going to be really, really chuffed. We've got the artists, we've got the technology all we need now is to get the ELC workforce chatting to each other and join the conversation!

Bex Carter (34:36)

You'll get there! [laughs] Yeah, absolutely.

Heather Armstrong (34:39)

Thanks so much Bex, I'll speak to you soon.

Bex Carter (34:40)

Lovely to speak you Heather, speak to you soon.

Heather Armstrong (34:41):

Bye!

Bex Carter (34:43):

See ya!

Catherine Wilson (34:46):

The Creative Skills Podcast was hosted by Heather Armstrong and our guest was Bex Carter. You can find out more about Edinburgh Early Years Podcast, which Bex hosts, by searching “Edinburgh Early Years Podcasts” on Google or through the Podcast apps, including SoundCloud, Google Podcasts, or Apple Podcasts. We'll also put the link in the episode notes.

Every episode of our podcast comes with resources you can access online to continue the creative conversation, to find this episode resources go to www.starcatchers.org.uk/episode1. You'll also find that link in the episode notes too!

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