STARCATCHERS
CREATIVE SKILLS ONLINE

The Creative Skills Podcast

Creative Skills Podcast S4, E1:
Putting the Voice of the Baby into Practice
Featuring Heather Armstrong and Kerry Cleland

Transcript

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Kerry and Heather podcast transcript

00:00:09:12 - 00:01:43:08

[music plays]

Intro

Amy Hall-Gibson

Welcome to the Creative Skills podcast – I'm Amy Hall Gibson. In this podcast Heather Armstrong is joined by Community Engagement Artist and performer Kerry Cleland. This episode explores the voice of the baby in relation to creative arts experiences for very young pre and non verbal children.

Voice of the baby is based on research undertaken by Dr Rachel Drury from the Royal Conservatorie of Scotland and Dr Cara Blaisdell from Queen Margaret University the research outlines five areas for consideration when using rights-based Creative approaches with babies and very young children.

You can find out more about Voice of The Baby by heading to our website and reading our Reflective Guide for the Arts and Our practical guide accompanied by a suite a videos exploring the five areas.

If you are listening to this podcast directly from the Starcatchers website, you may already know that with every episode, we create a reflective practice sheet - they are FULL of links to creative play ideas from each episode, and they have discussion questions and quick team exercises you can use to deliver your very own in-house training based on the podcast!

Also, a wee reminder that you can find all of our podcast episodes on Spotify, the Apple podcast app, or indeed any other podcast app on your smartphone.

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00:01:46:15 - 00:01:55:02

Heather Armstrong

Hi Kerry welcome to the podcast. So excited to be talking to you today. Do you want to start by telling us a little bit about your practice with Starcatchers?

00:01:55:20 - 00:02:37:11

Kerry Cleland

Erm yes, so I have been working with Starcatchers since 2019 and my background is I'm a performer, but my role mainly with Starcatchers is I'm a performer working in a community engagement context. So I work with families now based solely in the Wester Hailes area in Edinburgh, and I run two programs of work which are Expecting Something, which is a group for babies from birth to two and their adults, and Starcatchers Saturdays, which is two different sessions on a Saturday and one's for birth - 18 months.

00:02:37:21 - 00:02:52:02

Kerry Cleland

And then the other one is for birth to five and their adults. So, we connect with the Early Years centres and nurseries in the area. Erm and they often visit our Baby Studio with different setups that we have. Also, we will go out to the nurseries with different set of too

00:02:52:02 - 00:03:20:08

Heather Armstrong

Great! So today I wanted particularly to talk to you about the voice of the baby research that Starcatchers has been doing. Erm probably important to say that your sessions were an important part of the research in the first place so it's a little bit like a snake eating itself in that the researchers came to watch you and your sessions to help with the research and now I'm asking you to reflect on the research.

00:03:20:08 - 00:03:40:10

Heather Armstrong

It's quite meta. But one of the reasons I really wanted to speak to you is because it's so fantastic doing the research and getting all the kind of structures and things. But erm, you know, my job is always to say, well, actually, what does this look like in real life? And I know we had some really great chats off mic about what that looked like in your sessions.

00:03:40:16 - 00:04:04:01

Heather Armstrong

And I thought, actually, we need to bring these, we need to bring these chats to the wider world. So here we are today. In the reflective guide, the first area that the researchers talk about is curating the space, this area relates to the nature of the space itself and the materials and experiences created within it. So, tell us tell us about your your woolly session and what you think about when you're thinking about the space.

00:04:05:04 - 00:04:37:08

Kerry Cleland

Well, part of my process is that I would, I would sketch out what I think that the plan might be just to keep me on track and keep me thinking about what all the different offers are. But the main thing for me is when I've, whenever I'm actually creating the space and have time to set it up, I'll be thinking about different people and different families and different children that we work with. Erm overall, for me, setting up the space, I really like to try and make it as beautiful as possible so that there's a bit of a wow factor when people arrive.

00:04:37:08 - 00:04:57:05

Kerry Cleland

And that's a lot of the time for the adults and the practitioners as well. But also, I set it up like that because then I want to say yes, it can be pulled apart, moved around, changed in any way that the wee ones want to, and that part of the process is quite exciting for me that it's a yes space.

00:04:57:05 - 00:05:07:19

Heather Armstrong

So, when you're thinking about a yes space is part of that, about I guess the kind of health and safety to make sure that everything's kind of suitable for the wee ones.

00:05:08:13 - 00:05:46:13

Kerry Cleland

Obviously, I always think of health and safety, but yeah, and there is a risk assessment that goes along with everything, but it's more about creating things that can be taken

apart and that that is okay for the children to do that because that's part of their process and how they play. And so, I think it's just a thing of like we can strive for perfection and tidy, but actually for them to really be free in a space and explore in their own way, then we have to let all of that go. An example of it would be, and this was something that came from one of from Hailesland Early Years Centre.

00:05:46:13 - 00:06:10:15

Kerry Cleland

One of the practitioners there who knitted squares so that it could be taken, pulled apart. And when she said that that she allows them to be pulled apart I was like, I absolutely love that, and I want to take it on a bigger scale. So that's what I did, the sort of giant arm knitting and smaller patches as well, so that they can be unravelled. And that sensation is allowed, but also that the space is taken apart by the wee ones.

00:06:10:15 - 00:06:13:19

Heather Armstrong

Yeah. So, you talk about positive destruction, don't you?

00:06:14:06 - 00:06:15:08

Kerry Cleland

I do, yes.

00:06:16:01- 00:06:23:06

Heather Armstrong

I like that phrase. And is that what you mean by that? So, things that are supposed to be destroyed?

00:06:23:18 - 00:06:52:16

Kerry Cleland

Yes, absolutely. And I think. Yeah, positive destruction. I made a video one time of everything. It was over lockdown and that's all we could do. But it was just building

boxes as high as possible and creating this great structure that then could be pushed, pulled, hit to give that full body experience, to change the state of something erm, and so, yes, I'm big on positive destruction.

00:06:52:16 - 00:07:18:11

Kerry Cleland

And it's one of the things that a lot of the families I work with do often ask about and question, is this okay for my wee one to be doing this. And then I can say, yeah, that's totally part of their process and their learning and how their brains forming. And so, I then like to go and set something up so that they can do that, and I show that

00:07:18:21 - 00:07:22:01

Kerry Cleland

their adult that it is okay and we can keep doing that until they're like, okay, I'm done with that. And that's fulfilled. Whatever that need was in that moment.

00:07:22:18 - 00:07:25:18

Heather Armstrong

So, is about having a conversation with the carers in that moment?

00:07:26:16 - 00:08:03:21

Kerry Cleland

Yeah. Yeah. So for instance, we have a family at the moment who's that one of the mums is finding that the child wants to wants to wreck stuff a lot and that she's a bit worried about that but also pressure from other family members, like is that okay, and just to share with her that we think we think it is okay but also we can set up a safe space for the child to be able to do that in a really fun, playful way where mum can also stay alongside and play alongside to do the same thing and also feel what that's like in the satisfaction that, that, the wee one is getting in that moment.

00:08:03:21 - 00:08:24:03

Kerry Cleland

And they can enjoy that too. And I guess it's about diverting what they're wrecking and giving them that experience. It is like the throwing stones at a window, and you say, well, you want to throw, instead of stopping the throwing, let's see what else we can throw in a safer way. But you still get that movement. And the, the thing that you wanted to do.

00:08:24:13 - 00:09:01:01

Heather Armstrong

Yeah, it's something we talk about a lot when I run, erm, schema training. Where we are looking at kind of play schemas and you can have some really interesting conversations with adults about what adults consider to be naughty behaviour but actually when you link it back to schemas it absolutely makes sense. And yeah, that I always find that kind of throwing stones at a window thing really interesting, because I wonder actually how many of us actually if there were no consequences how many of us, seriously, how many of us would enjoy that.

00:09:01:12 - 00:09:05:10

Kerry Cleland

Yeah.

00:09:05:10 - 00:09:06:24

Heather Armstrong

Maybe saying more about myself then.

00:09:07:14 - 00:09:31:09

Kerry Cleland

Yeah. But kind of in some ways it's like the graffiti thing, isn't it? It's like we don't always want to just sit with a small piece of paper on it, like you want to write on walls, you want to write on bigger things and make it a bigger body experience. Yeah. So, it's allowing that and giving, having these chances for families to try stuff like that together.

00:09:31:23 - 00:09:45:09

Heather Armstrong

Yeah, I might, I feel like this is effortlessly segwaying into the second section, but I feel like that must do quite a lot for the families in terms of how they're able to see their wee one particularly if they are struggling with this behaviour elsewhere.

00:09:46:11 - 00:10:11:10

Kerry Cleland

Yeah. And it's changing something that feels negative and understandably overwhelming when yeah. They're dealing with this a lot day in day and day out. But even if they can come to us once or twice a week and we can set up this fun, playful erm, set up but also where the other families that they're with, because I think a lot of the families feel judged when their children behave in this way.

00:10:11:16 - 00:10:21:24

Kerry Cleland

Speaker 2

But actually, you're with a whole group of people with babies of similar ages and toddlers, and they can all join in, and we can all understand together. And there's no judgment in the space.

00:10:22:23 - 00:10:28:24

Heather Armstrong

So, when you're planning a space, do you have kind of specific ways to play in mind?

00:10:28:24 - 00:10:45:09

Kerry Cleland

I mean, when I'm setting up a space, I'll always think about like what my offer could be if maybe there's an adult not sure how to play or what to do with certain things. So, I'll always have some ideas up my sleeve, but I never do I have a point where I'm attached to that because if it doesn't happen, it doesn't matter.

00:10:45:18 - 00:11:09:18

Kerry Cleland

Erm but yeah, certainly I would, I would be thinking about these things, and I'd be thinking about specific children that I know and work with what they might like and how they might like things set up and what they, what their needs, where, where were they last week. And maybe they're still searching for that this week. But at the same time when they arrive the space is over to them.

00:10:45:18- 00:11:38:22

Kerry Cleland

Yeah, and we'd all follow that, but a lot of the times when I'm setting up, obviously we're working from birth to two, which is technically birth to 36 months at Expecting Something and that's, that's huge age range. So, we'll have three-month-old babies so I'll be thinking about right what what's the offer for that the lowest age range and what's what will the near three-year-old be getting up to within this space and how how each offer can apply to them?

00:11:39:23 - 00:12:09:18

Heather Armstrong

So, the second section of the research focuses on building sensitive, informed relationships. So, this area relates to what the researchers picked up as an affectionate hosting approach to babies, young children and their families, warm relationships and navigating tensions around expectations. So that, and that directly relates to what you've already been speaking about those kind of relationships and the expectations of wee ones.

00:12:10:02 - 00:12:25:16

Heather Armstrong

And again, I suppose it shows just how wonderfully, how well that this reflective guide, all the sections do, absolutely, like interlock with the others. Erm, I want to ask you a wee bit about the affectionate hosting relationship though, what does that look like?

00:12:53:23 - 00:13:19:24

Kerry Cleland

Well, I think, I'm going to take Expecting Something as the main example here. Erm, with the relationships that we have with families, they're built up over time. But I think I think the main thing is that Katy and I absolutely 100% want to be there, too, and love our work and enjoy spending time with the families. And I think sometimes we've needed the session on the Thursday as much as everyone else.

00:13:20:14 - 00:13:47:13

Kerry Cleland

And we just get to know each other through play and through in a really nice circumstance where we're, we're all playing together in these lovely experiences every week, but also that the adults that come to our sessions know that if they're not having the best day, they can still come along and they'll be supported. And a lot of the times they say they need that in their week, of that time on a Thursday. Erm and a lot of our work is outdoors as well when it can be, and I feel that that's really good for everyone's wellbeing if we're able to be outside for a little while and automatically the babies are really happy to be outside. And the adult takes sometimes a wee bit more convincing but then everybody erm, acknowledges that it feels it feels good to be out for those couple of hours every week.

00:13:48:00 - 00:13:53:02

Heather Armstong

Yeah, I think you bring a lot of empathy to your work. Does that sound right?

00:13:53:02 - 00:14:22:17

Kerry Cleland

I have been called an empath before. Yes. Erm, yeah. I mean, I think, I'm from a hospitality background as well. So, there's part of me that really enjoys having people arrive to something that looks great, feels great, erm we have lunch together and everything afterwards. And I like to host a space, and I like to make sure everybody feels welcome.

00:14:23:01 - 00:14:57:14

Kerry Cleland

And also, there's a lot of when new people come along, there'll be families and maybe even with us for almost two years more that we have the relationship already built up. So, I can bring them in and go, okay, this family's new and they'll also help with that. It's not just me as a host. It's like everyone's a host in their own way, especially. Lots of families that have been with us for a long time. They know that they enjoy taking on that role, too. So, we, we really work as a team at Expecting Something. And I think that is part of the joy.

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Heather Armstong

Yeah, and do you find sometimes that families end up talking to you about things that aren't play related?

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Kerry Cleland

Yes. And that happens. And it's a result of creating a safe, non-judgmental space. And people are, erm, will have things happen in their lives that they need help with or that we can support them with. And a lot of the times it's just about I, myself and Katy, building up, erm, relationships with other partners in the community that we can then refer people on to and signpost.

00:15:32:11 - 00:15:52:22

Kerry Cleland

But a lot of the time things will come up within our sessions that people want to talk about. So yeah, that is part and parcel with that and I feel that it's a really positive thing when it happens because it means that people feel that they trust us and that we can help. Yeah.

00:15:53:13 - 00:16:25:11

Heather Armstrong

And I think it's a really powerful aspect to the work that you do. And I know we, as an organisation, we've had lots of conversations over the years about how that role works and particularly bringing other professionals in is a really important aspect of it as well, isn't it? Erm, it also strikes me that when we think about how the learning from this research can apply over other sectors, I absolutely know that there are other kind of other sectors beyond the arts that build can really great relationships with the families they work with.

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Heather Armstrong

I wondered if there's something about the arts that does it particularly well ,is it, is it kind of the play and the art that makes a difference?

00:16:35:13- 00:17:28:08

Kerry Cleland

Yeah, well, I think there's something about coming somewhere and feeling so relaxed and feeling that it's not it's not clinical space. It's not, there's no one there that it's just like it's just us. It's just me. It's just Katy. It's just we're not teachers. We don't hold all the information and the knowledge that people need. But we know people that do have knowledge that people might need. Erm, that, you know, the main aim for what we do is that we want people to come along, and we want people to really engage and bond with their babies. And I think that, I think Katy, in particular, is very good at tuning into people when they're feeling this way and then having an offer for that adult.

00:17:28:08 - 00:17:48:06

Kerry Cleland

Maybe they just need their own creative time. And so, every week it's different. It might be that the adults fully engage and play the whole time and the next week, maybe they just need some time to themselves with something creative to do or just a conversation. That then they have the capacity to then play with their wee one, maybe later that day.

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Kerry Cleland

And so, everything's bespoke. Everything's about the individual. Yeah. And I'm getting the balance of that. So, when we're setting up a session, that's another element that we'd be thinking of as well. I'm very much about specific people have like, okay, we know that they're struggling a wee bit with this at the moment or they're tired. What do we have for them that we can tap into that and let them have that moment and time to themselves?

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Heather Armstrong

Yeah, I mean, I don't know how many times I've said this phrase since 2020, but it's absolutely that thing of like when you are stressed or tired or under pressure, your creativity and your playfulness is that is the first thing to go. Yeah. And I think it's really special that you create these spaces of relationships that gives these families a chance to kind of reconnect with that.

00:18:46:06 - 00:19:11:23

Heather Armstrong

I know we, we think about the voice of the baby in terms of erm, obviously like shaping the planning because we spoke about how their needs and interests' kind of shape the session and obviously the ways that babies communicate with us is kind of part of those kinds of relationships. Do you think the creative experiences also help with the carers being able to tune into their wee ones?

00:19:13:15 - 00:19:36:15

Kerry Cleland

Yeah, definitely. Erm and I, I think a lot of it is like when we offer because we don't do the same thing every week, we change up what we're doing and we respond to the needs of the group, they get, and we have different themes. So, they get to see their baby enjoying different things, seeing them in a new light, seeing them experiencing new things.

00:19:37:16 - 00:19:57:21

Kerry Cleland

And that is really joyful for their adult to see. And then they can join them in that play. And we'll think about things again. The different age groups of the babies and how their adult might want to interact with them and what the what the offer for the adult could be, especially if they're new to the group and maybe they sit back a wee bit more than other people.

00:19:57:21 - 00:20:32:13

Kerry Cleland

What's a really genuine play offer that they will feel at ease with? So there's things that we might bring out again and again because we know that actually this is a really easy way to tap in with playfulness. My, my first thought is the ribbons on a stick. There's something about those that are very simple that you're creating this thing, but it is a very simple thing to play with that an adult, maybe if they're feeling a wee bit awkward in the space and they're just new to the group, but they feel like they're doing something.

00:20:33:21 - 00:20:43:22

Heather Armstrong

Ok, I'm a massive believer in props, particularly when it comes to movement. I am not one of nature's natural movers, but give me a ribbon on a stick.

00:20:43:22 - 00:20:44:16

Heather Armstrong

Give me, Give me a scarf. And I am gone. It’s a nice reminder though to say that, you know, and you put kind of a lot of time and care and thought into the kind of creative experiences that you put together but it's not nec, it's not about everyone having to be the perfect artist. It's not about I kind of high skill level in terms of taking part, is it?

00:21:07:16 - 00:21:34:20

Kerry Cleland

No, not not at all. But I mean, we learn from all the adults in our group as well, because when you tap into people's creativity, it's like, wow, the most amazing things come out. We had a storyteller recently, the wonderful Andy Cannon, and he was using origami as

part of his storytelling process and it was great. And then the next thing, one of the mums in the group was like oh I can do it, and she had a whole origami background.

00:21:35:12 - 00:21:53:23

Kerry Cleland

Wow! And then became the Entertainer in the space! It was a bit of a wow factor and that. Erm, and we have in the group at the moment, we've got another mum that we've just discovered that used to be in the circus. What? Yeah, so we're having a baby circus themed session now because she's going to show off her skills. That's amazing.

00:21:53:23 - 00:22:16:24

Kerry Cleland

And we love doing that. Like a lot of, a lot of the families that we're working with at the moment love to dress up. And so, we had a, we had a baby office theme for a while that we've done a few times because it's so good and it really is really good fun for everyone. But the last time we did it were like, Right, when you arrive Expecting Something today, you're coming to the office.

00:22:17:04 - 00:22:45:15

Kerry Cleland

So, we had parents coming suited and booted, ready for their days, work for a play session and we all play these characters. But it's really important and I think this is why I love expecting something as a baby group and why, why I couldn't do a lot of other baby groups because with expecting something it's about the adult enjoying themselves as much as the wee one because it's truly finding your playful self.

00:22:45:15 - 00:22:58:24

Kerry Cleland

And that might take a while for some people, but that's the goal that the babies end up seeing their adults truly enjoying themselves and playing with each other in a really genuine way.

00:22:59:18 - 00:23:13:01

Heather Armstong

Yeah, because we know how important play is for healthy development, but if you're main playmate, usually your parent or carer, at that age. If they're not into it, it's really difficult.

00:23:13:20 - 00:23:32:05

Kerry Cleland

It's also not a nice place to be as an adult. I'm going to fake play today because I have to, and I'm told that that's what I need to do. But actually, if it's not coming from a genuine place, then I think the level of bonding is restricted and nobody needs it this way. There's other ways.

00:23:32:17 - 00:24:00:15

Heather Armstong

It's a really important it's a really important point. So, the third section of the reflective guide talks about navigating identity. This area relates to questions about gender stereotypes supporting the diverse identities of babies and families, maintaining the space for babies and artists, helping with care routines. So, I guess maybe we'll start with your own identity within the space.

00:24:00:24 - 00:24:05:08

Heather Armstrong

Do you feel that it changes over the course of a session?

00:24:05:08 - 00:24:31:13

Kerry Cleland

Oh, yes. I mean, the main identity that I'm always trying to get to is to be playing in the space and modeling, play and using my background as a performer to play with objects and to listen. But of course, my role changes to be the host or to be the person that maybe has a knowledge on what somebody needs to know within the community or who to refer them to.

00:24:32:07 - 00:24:43:04

Kerry Cleland

Erm, yeah, it changes throughout a session. And then sometimes I'm the chef! Many different hats, which I love.

00:24:43:16 - 00:24:47:18

Heather Armstrong

And how do the identities of the families shape the sessions?

00:24:48:13 - 00:25:16:17

Kerry Cleland

Well, Wester Hailes is a very diverse community, and we have lots of families from different cultures and a lot of the times we are trying to tap it and understand people's needs and also for each other to understand everybody's needs and understand people's choices and opinions and ways of play. And that's just something that we work at every week.

00:25:17:04 - 00:25:46:11

Kerry Cleland

But also, sometimes we'll have plans just so that we can play with each other's cultures in some way as well. So, for instance, we're planning a, a wedding, an Expecting Something wedding, but we'll also, throughout the planning that we'll find out about the different people that come to our group and what in their culture that a wedding might look like and what the main things are.

00:25:47:04 - 00:26:02:06

Kerry Cleland

And so, whenever we eventually have this big jazzy session, then we'll have all different examples of what a wedding could be. But it's a it's a just a chance to celebrate and play and dance together.

00:26:02:06 - 00:26:16:14

Heather Armstong

Again, I think that's a really good example of how because the sessions are shaped by the participants, it's kind of recognising the different identities within, but then being able to celebrate them together, which is which is lovely.

00:26:17:22 - 00:26:37:15

Kerry Cleland

So, this morning I was reading about Diwali. That will be in the autumn, in November, and about the different religions that celebrate it in their own ways. But it's obviously a lot to do with light. Yeah, as I was reading it, I was like, that is a really could be a really beautiful session, especially for the younger babies.

00:26:38:07 - 00:26:49:03

Kerry Cleland

And in winter when we go, it will be November, so we'll probably be indoors. But also, it’s a really nice way to recognise other people's celebrations

00:26:50:17 - 00:26:57:07

Heather Armstong

Lovely! And do you find that gender identity comes into the sessions?

00:26:58:12 - 00:27:35:10

Kerry Cleland

Yes, a lot. And it's a really tricky one as well to navigate. Erm because a lot of people have strong feelings about things, erm, but that's the joy of working long term with families that we can do that in a really supportive, non-judgmental, gentle way. Erm, but we yeah, there will be times where we might have, say, dress up items or items that that might be a bit people see as gender specific.

00:27:36:12 - 00:27:52:00

Heather Armstrong

I know there's been a lot of research that even people who don't have kind of conscious bias expect, you know, young children to play in different ways. So, they tend to kind of underestimate girls physically.

00:27:52:15 - 00:27:52:23

Kerry Cleland

Yeah.

00:27:53:04 - 00:28:11:18

Heather Armstong

And put more expectations on them in terms of like social and emotional play. Erm, with boys, they tend to expect more of them physically. And I guess it's about how do we, how do we navigate that within our sessions.

00:28:13:02 - 00:28:36:15

Kerry Cleland

Yeah. And the physical side of things. I think even taking the gender side of things out of it, a lot, a lot of what working in the outdoors can do, the ground is not even where we work and there are areas where they're like, Oh, I want to go up there. Even if they think, oh, I'm not sure that they're physically there yet with the walking to get there.

00:28:37:03 - 00:29:02:23

Kerry Cleland

And my way of supporting that is it is listening to the child in the moment and seeing where they're at. But also I might copy exactly what they're doing and move in the exact same way that they are. Erm, and I am confident enough in my movement to be able to do that and maybe their adult isn't. Yeah, but we're following the child and saying, you can do this and we are going to allow you to explore in this way physically.

00:29:03:13 - 00:29:26:04

Kerry Cleland

And that's something that that feels much safer to do working outside than than inside. But yes, with the gender side of things that can also come into it because it also is how baby girls are dressed a lot of the time and they're not dressed in a way that they can have the freedom of movement that they may be need.

00:29:26:04 - 00:29:49:10

Kerry Cleland

But, I would say I'm sort of saying that, but that's more about me seeing things in parks rather than in our own sessions, because a lot of the families, as soon as they've been to Expecting Something a couple of times, understand that, all right, I see where we're at here. This can get really messy. And this is very child led and it can be outdoors.

00:29:49:23 - 00:30:13:24

Kerry Cleland

And so, we, we don't tend to have that as an issue. And I guess in some ways we don't really bring in that many items that would be like, for instance, we don't really work with dolls or items like that. That would maybe be, but maybe we change, maybe we, maybe we should be bringing this up early doors.

00:30:13:24 - 00:30:14:06

Kerry Cleland

Yeah.

00:30:14:07 - 00:30:19:18

Heather Armstrong

I suppose that's that isn't it. Because you use so many kind of like open ended resources.

00:30:19:22 - 00:30:20:10

Kerry Cleland

Yes.

00:30:20:10 - 00:30:32:07

Heather Armstrong

That can be played with in lots of different ways. It kind of takes away from, whereas if you had a session full of baby dolls and Spiderman action figures, the play might be quite different.

00:30:32:24 - 00:30:58:17

Kerry Cleland

Yeah, yeah. And now, now I'm planning. No, I mean, I think the thing for me is I'm where I want to be in the space is, is to be really listening to what that child wants in that moment. And so, a lot of the times I've built up enough of a trusted relationship with the adult to be allowed to listen to the child in that way and then play in that way.

00:30:59:05 - 00:31:16:14

Kerry Cleland

And so, if it's something that maybe as a girl they might think, Oh, no, you can't do that, you can't go down the steps like that. I'm sort of there and I'm matching it and I'm another adult that's keeping them safe. Yeah. So, I sort of see my role is to allow these things to happen in a safe and trusted way.

00:31:17:09 - 00:31:21:21

Kerry Cleland

And, and again, that's, that's why we should be working long term.

00:31:22:11 - 00:31:53:20

Heather Armstong

Yeah. It just highlights those relationships once again doesn't it. And actually when it does come to breaking down stereotypes, nothing is more powerful than people's own experiences in terms of being in a session and saying, Oh, actually little boys are capable of being gentle and thoughtful and loving, and little girls are capable of being adventurous and boisterous and engaging in that kind of positive destruction that we spoke about earlier. It's lovely!

00:31:54:00 - 00:32:17:11

Heather Armstong

Okay. The fourth section of the reflective guide is about respecting and validating the complex communication of babies. So this area relates to artists tuning in, interpreting and validating babies, verbal and nonverbal communication. What might this look like in your sessions?

00:32:18:12 - 00:32:58:14

Kerry Cleland

Erm, that sort of just feels like it sums up my job. And that's what that's the bit that I love the most is tuning in to the cues of the babies. And a lot of the time it's modeling the amount of time that that takes. And I think I think in in a sort of normal adult world, everything happened so fast and we're so busy and our minds are in a million different places that we're not taking the time to just stop and maybe enter a different sort of different time zone as to how long we might just stare at each other for, how long , how much we are.

00:32:58:14 - 00:33:21:03

Kerry Cleland

It's okay if you're like, I'm thinking sort of made conversation with a baby of nonverbal conversation and they just turn around and leave you and that's okay. Like, you don't need to feel awkward about that, but as adults we sometimes do. It's like, Oh, I'm sort of left hanging here. Yeah, but that's that's a really tough choice.

00:33:21:03 - 00:33:45:00

Kerry Cleland

You just got to you got to you got to take it. And the more you work with babies, it's just like that. That's the best thing is that you've got a really honest audience, and that's why I like making work for babies as well as like because if it's not good, they're just they're going to tell you and there's no pretense and and yeah, taking the time, I think time is a huge thing.

00:33:45:00 - 00:34:03:15

Kerry Cleland

And I work with children with complex needs a lot and the processing time can be much slower. And it's about learning to sit in the silence and what that can bring and how that's allowing for that communication to come. And that will be a lot of what we do in sessions.

00:34:03:15 - 00:34:43:04

Heather Armstrong

I sometimes think of it, about, you know, people talk about the zoom pause over lockdown, and we all started using video calls more and we all had to get used to the much longer pause you need to leave. In terms of, has anyone got any questions and it feels like an eternity, but it's really important to do. And it's, it's the same communicating with wee ones, isn't it? Just as you say, just really being able to slow down and really wait and give them that cognition time before they might, I say answer you, but obviously most of the time we're talking about the kind of non-verbal communication.

00:34:44:11 - 00:35:00:06

Kerry Cleland

Yeah, but I mean I, I totally feel that I do have proper conversations with no words. And that's erm, yeah, that's just part of, part of my job and the best bit of it.

00:35:01:03 - 00:35:25:06

Heather Armstong

And I think, again, that's one of the aspects of the art, the art part of it, that I think we sometimes forget is that, you know, although well, I think our Starcatchers artists,

you're very special people anyway in terms of being able to do the job you do and you bring a lot of your own kind of personality and interests to what you do.

0:35:25:16 - 00:35:44:13

Heather Armstrong

But also, when you think about the skills of a performer, you think about facial expressions and movement and embodying different characters and, you know, being in the moment and having those improvisation skills. And I guess you're bringing a lot of that to your work with babies.

00:35:45:00 - 00:36:06:15

Kerry Cleland

Yeah, because I mean, I think I've had conversations with people before and their like, yeah but you're not, what you do in the community, that's not that's not performing, that's not there. And I'm like, well, I'm not I'm not on stage with a script. But actually lots of the skills that I've had the time to get comfortable with and feel okay with erm, are used daily erm, and part of the confidence to listen in that way and take the time to do that.

00:36:07:03 - 00:36:35:21

Kerry Cleland

Like, also it's that thing of coming back to objects and playing with them. I do remember many sessions at drama school being in this room where, you know, you're practically being auditioned and you have to play with this object in a certain way and people are watching you and it's hard and you feel judged and you think, am I doing the wrong thing?

00:36:35:21 - 00:36:58:16

Kerry Cleland

You're afraid of failing. And yet, but I've done that for as many years in different shows and stuff and different workshops that I'm kind of past that point now, but I also can relate to an adult that maybe begins our groups that maybe that somewhere where

they're feeling when they've got this object in front of them, like are people ,am I doing this right with my baby?

00:36:58:16 - 00:37:21:22

Kerry Cleland

Am I doing it in the right way? And so, I guess it's tapping into the experiences as well and remembering how people might feel and how I might be able to support with that. And a lot, a lot of what I do, and we spoke about this a lot over COVID times was the need for silliness. Yeah, I love being silly

00:37:22:08 - 00:38:07:24

Kerry Cleland

and that's also in my job description erm and how, but how also I'm now going of on one, but how much it's used as a negative term, the word silly and actually it's joyous and it's play in a really honest way. And I think as kids, as children grow up and come through school, silly becomes a really negative thing. And in Expecting Something and Starcatchers Saturdays, it's absolutely something that we try and embrace because it it brings a joy to the room and if we can all just be a little bit more silly, I think life would be better.

00:38:07:24 - 00:38:26:07

Heather Armstong

I genuinely think that's where kind of those moments of like bonding and understanding your baby can really come in as well. When, you know, at that moment when you can be silly together and like she had a laugh. To me that feels like a really important milestone to be able to like genuinely have a laugh with your wee one.

00:38:26:07 - 00:38:27:24

Kerry Cleland

Yeah, totally.

00:38:28:04 - 00:39:12:18

Heather Armstong

And so, you know, when I was talking about all the kind of like performance skills that you bring and obviously you you've been you've been professionally trained, you're very, very good at it. But it also strikes me that that's what the babies and young children come with. So, before they have the kind of verbal language to say, actually, Kerry this is what I think about your session, it is their facial expressions and movements and kind of noises and interactions that that they're kind of bringing. So, I'm getting really close to quoting ABBA, saying mama said, I was a dancer before I could walk but it's true, isn't it?

00:39:15:12 - 00:39:39:18

Kerry Cleland

It is, well actually just even coming down to like baby's movements. And how they like, the mirroring and the play that comes along with that is really joyful as well. And we went through a phase of doing these like warmups at Expecting Something, but the baby would lead the warmup, so everybody had to get into that position. But yeah, and that, that

00:39:39:23 - 00:39:41:03

Kerry Cleland

Yeah, and that's silly.

00:39:41:13 - 00:39:42:09

Heather Armstrong

That's amazing! Yeah.

00:39:42:17 - 00:40:09:15

Kerry Cleland

It's also just connecting with where they're at in that moment as well. But people enjoying other people's babies. Yeah. Yeah. And I think that's something that we have at our groups that's really lovely. Erm, that the longer you work with people in that way, they say it sort of takes a village. It feels like sometimes that we've got a little village that comes together to look out for each other and help other families.

00:40:10:00 - 00:40:38:12

Heather Armstong

What a lovely moment as well, both in terms of a wee one being able to lead that physical warm up in that moment. Yeah, but also watching, you know, as the parent or carer, being able to watch your baby affect a whole room of people. That's really special. That's lovely. Erm, so the fifth section, final section is about making time for young children to be heard.

00:40:39:03 - 00:41:26:02

Heather Armstong

So, this area relates to children's development and the period of time that artists work with them. So, for some artist, this might be over a number of weeks or months. For others it might be the duration of a performance. And again, the the genius of our researchers is that I feel like time has naturally come up, as we've spoken about a lot of the other erm, the other sections, which again shows how well, this all kind of fits in. But I guess one of the things we haven't spoken about is what do you do if you haven't had that time with a group before? So, if you're going into a group that is brand new to you, what do you do then? Or, I guess I guess with a performance as well, if it's an audience that you're just going to see once?

00:41:27:06 - 00:41:56:07

Kerry Cleland

Well, I guess when you're talking about performances, I guess the work I want to make and I'm making is, erm, flexible enough that there's still time within it to properly listen to your audience member and that can extend if needed. For instance, one of the shows I'm making at the moment is a durational performance so it will last for 3 hours and they can be in for the whole 3 hours or they could be in for 20 minutes and then go.

00:41:56:07 - 00:42:19:00

Kerry Cleland

It's up to the individual family member and what that baby needs in the space. But also, if maybe there's a moment where there's a performer really going on, a beautiful journey with a baby and then with a conversation that if there's something in the space, it's

happening in the moment, in that moment, and allowing that to happen, then it's not just going to be moved on because that's where the show needs to go to next.

00:42:19:13 - 00:42:55:17

Kerry Cleland

It'll be cued that we move on when the moment is right and then when that conversation is ending. But in this, yeah, in the same way when I set up a session or a community session, it might be that there's three different offers that we have ABC and we bring out B when, but B will only come out whenever the babies tell us that we're done with A because it might be the whole thing at that time. So, it's about having things up your sleeves, but also always listening to where everyone's up in the room.

00:42:56:13 - 00:43:17:02

Heather Armstong

The three hours thing is really interesting. Because I think a lot of people, when they're thinking about babies and young children, would say there's no way, there's no way a baby could concentrate for 3 hours. I think you plan sessions that are maybe longer than people might expect.

00:43:17:02 - 00:43:52:03

Kerry Cleland

Yeah. I mean, one of the great things about working outdoors as well is if the session runs on longer, there's nobody booked into the space next. So we can just continue. And that's something that happens a lot, is this expectation that you arrive with your baby and they're going to be absolutely ready to play. And that's my job to see and respect when they are not ready and for us to have enough time for them to come into the process on their terms and at their pace and support the adult.

00:43:52:03 - 00:44:11:17

Kerry Cleland

With that, I'll let them know it’s okay. But also one of the reasons why with expecting something we have the second hour is when we have our lunch together. But also my

job at that moment might be that that baby's ready to play and, then that's whenever. Yeah, that's whenever, I just continue to play and have my lunch later.

00:44:12:00 - 00:44:12:11

Heather Armstong

Yeah

00:44:13:08 - 00:45:04:16

Kerry Cleland

I'm just Yeah. Time is time is everything. And yeah, it's tricky when I'm going into like a nursery setting and I've only got a certain amount of time. And I think for me that's about my expectation is that maybe, maybe it isn't long enough for that wee one to connect with me erm and I can use face in it and I might just have to return another time and get to know them better. Erm and sitting comfortably with that and that in a nursery setting the practitioners know best and they know that child. So yeah, within those kind of contexts, if I've only got an hour to drop in somewhere, that's really tricky and my preference would be that it would be longer than that.

00:45:05:05 - 00:45:35:13

Heather Armstong

I guess it's again, it's that kind of thing of really listening to wee ones and how their , their voice kind of shapes your practice, isn't it? Because I think with more adult led offers, because there's a lot more structure. I agree that if you're want to do something very structured with babies or toddlers, that probably is a fairly short window.

00:45:36:06 - 00:45:58:21

Heather Armstong

But I guess that's because when something's adult led, what you're doing is you're asking wee ones to fit into the expectations of what you want to happen within the session. Whereas when we are looking at practice that's more responsive and really kind of centres that voice of the baby, that's when that time becomes more important, isn't it?

00:45:58:21 - 00:46:11:21

Heather Armstong

Because it's letting go of those expectations and saying, well, actually, this is genuinely about you and what you want to say and what you'd interested in, and we're probably not going to complete that in 20 minutes.

00:46:12:03 - 00:46:34:17

Kerry Cleland

Yeah, I mean, an example of that is I went into an Early Years Centre to do some development work and what I wanted as an artist was erm, because of because I had a glimpse of it before of me saying into the microphone, leaving time and then the babies would respond with sound. Erm, so I was like, Oh, I want to play with that again.

00:46:35:12 - 00:46:55:13

Kerry Cleland

And, and so we were in for like two or 3 hours and there was no success through the microphones. But what they loved was the slide whistle and the slide, whistle wasn't even part of the, it was just something that we brought to play. But then you're like, Well, we're here, and we're listening, and that's what that's what they love.

00:46:55:13 - 00:47:01:21

Kerry Cleland

And what they want to play with. And so you have to let go. You can't, you can't be precious about anything.

00:47:02:19 - 00:47:14:12

Heather Armstrong

Thank you so much, Kerry. This has been such a lovely chat erm, thank you for bringing your practice to life. [Outro music starts to play] Oh it has been so lovely to talk to you, Kerry. Thanks so much.

00:47:14:23 - 00:47:19:23

Kerry Cleland

Thank you, Heather.

00:47:19:23 - 00:48:12:11

Outro

Amy Hall-Gibson

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