



# VOICE OF THE BABY: THE SUMMERSTON APPROACH

## Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Staff Development

**Summerston Childcare Centre are a partner provider ELC setting working with babies and young children birth-5. They are based in Bellcraig Community Centre in the Summerston area of Glasgow.**

Summerston approached Starcatchers looking for training and mentoring for their staff so they could strengthen their practice and confidence around children's rights and creativity.

We have been using a combination of training days and mentoring sessions, using the Reflective Guide to help ELC practitioners identify ways to listen and respond to the "voices" of babies and young children.

Read more about Starcatchers Voice of the Baby research and resources by following the link below:

 [VOICE OF THE BABY](#)

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### **Full Day training: Introduction**

Sharing of working within an arts and early years context specifically focusing on the voice of the child within early learning and childcare.

- UNCRC and what children's rights look like birth-5
- Voice of the Child within Creative and Expressive Arts experiences
- Starcatchers Engagement Signals
- Professional discussion around planning and evidencing outcome

### Session 1

Amy Hall Gibson session took a schematic play approach incorporating facial expressions exploring how babies voices influences the play within the space. Playing with size using small handheld cardboard boxes and hula hoops as opposed to massive ones to really experience those small sometimes overlooked engagements. Taking a sensory approach Foil Blankets were introduced to further explore babies voice within their senses – do they like being enclosed? Do they like the feel / sound?

### Session 2

Pearl Kinnear explored visual art through body art. Little ones were able to express themselves through mark making, exploring a yes space to painting on their bodies as well as considering mark making whilst standing and how the freedom to move their bodies can impact on their agency in expressing themselves.

### Key Observations

#### **Complex Communication of Babies**

- Choices are validated through allowing for time to explore materials first
- Adult introducing the creative experience with no agenda – allowing babies to explore and responding to what they engage in
- Signs of positive engagement – smiling, pointing, laughing – other babies then started engaging

#### **Space**

- Recognized the importance of creating a “yes” space, using baby safe and accessible materials allows staff to follow babies’ lead
- Creative experiences allowed the staff and babies to use their familiar space in new ways, e.g mark making on the floor instead of at a table, and using bodies instead of paper

*In Session 3 babies voices had impact in the medium term – the needs and interests they communicated in sessions 1 and 2 influenced the plan for session 3.*

### Session 3

Amy Hall Gibson introduced large cardboard boxes, cellophane, tape and mark making materials – these resources were chosen based on engagement from the first two sessions. Using larger scale materials with babies requires collaboration between adults and babies, giving the staff clear roles in the creative process.

Key Observations – these were used by staff to plan session 4

#### **Space**

- Make sure there is plenty of space for children to explore (move furniture to side of room)
- No rules (always keep safe)

#### **Relationships**

- Work together, form positive relationships, communicate, praise their work

#### **Complex Communication of Babies**

- Observe children’s movements/sounds/facial expressions/non-verbal and verbal over a period of time, explore their interests

#### **Identity**

- Look at children exploring together vs independently and how long they spend in different areas of the setting

#### **Time**

- Observing children’s development over time, how long they spend with staff vs independent play

### 3

- Staff planned a creative experience based on their learning from Sessions 1-3
- Babies voices had impact in the medium term – the needs and interests they communicated in sessions 1-3 influenced the plan for session 4.
- They used Voice of the Baby: In Practice resource to deepen their understanding of the five areas of practice.
- They also drew from their wider practice and relationships with the babies to shape their session.

### 4

Staff delivered creative experience with Amy Hall Gibson for support. Cardboard boxes, cellophane, fabric snowballs, tuned bells and real pine branches were used to create a winter wonderland imaginative play experience.

Amy fed back that the engagement in this session was the highest/most sustained, due a number of factors:

- The staff drew on their existing relationships and knowledge of the children's needs and interests, e.g. introducing fabric snowballs as they knew trajectory was being explored frequently
- The staff were more confident to respond to the needs and interests of the children in the moment as they had planned this session
- The staff set up the materials without the children in the space, resulting in a WOW factor when the children returned to a space transformed
- Staff were more confident in their own creativity – the combination of this newfound confidence with the long standing relationships meant engagement was more sustained and deeper (compared to the relatively short relationships with the artists)

*It is refreshing to see the practice of someone else and share ideas for practice. The staff learned a lot from the in-service training where we discussed the rights of the child and the engagement signals. The engagement signals have proved to be extremely valuable in encouraging staff to think about levels of engagement and enjoyment levels within the setting and the work they do. The videos Starcatchers have produced to go alongside the training are a perfect way of capturing the attention of practitioners to demonstrate first hand the reactions and responses from children and babies. These have influenced the practitioners in our setting to really tune in to the responses from our babies and as a result they are listening more to the non-verbal child. Working with Amy has been great. She has a lovely way at engaging the children and staff with her calming nature and responsive practice.*

**Quote from Summerston staff**

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**Babies voices can have an impact in the long term – the learning from these sessions can be used to shape future planning across the setting.**

QUOTE FROM JENNIFER HALL, MANAGER:

*The learning from the sessions has impacted the learning and planning in our setting in terms of the terminology used within professional dialogue with colleagues and parents. There is greater recognition of the non-verbal voice and as a result planning and reflections consider the engagement levels of the non-verbal children in greater depth than previously. Further, the staff are thinking better about the environment and use of resources. For the future, these training sessions have provided us with a future direction. We have a plan in place for further training we would like to take part in and for our areas of strength and development.*

An extra observation from Jennifer Hall in regards to the next steps towards training:

*I do agree there is potential to go deeper with the voice of the baby and it is something I would be interested in for the future. I also think there is potential to somehow facilitate organisations learning from each other and the power of video recordings for reflecting on practice. I noticed when we had the session recorded how differently staff set up the environment, responded to the children, were aware of how loud they were etc. Possibly another angle for future training?*

If you are interested in this approach to professional development, get in touch with **Heather Armstrong, Starcatchers' Head of Early Years Development at [info@starcatchers.org.uk](mailto:info@starcatchers.org.uk).**