

MCRC

ARTISTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER



Funding Provided By:

Ontario
Trillium
Foundation



Fondation
Trillium
de l'Ontario

2016-2018 REPORT

ACT Partner:



WHY ACT?

1

Children are competent and full of ideas that are worth knowing about



They help us see the world as it is and how it could be. Their ideas can change us; how we live, our relationships with one another, how we interact with our environment, what we value, how we use our time, how we think, what we spend our money on, etc.

2

Children have the right to be heard



In Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child it states that all children under the age of 18, “Have the right to give [their] opinion and for adults to listen and take it seriously.” Inherent in this right is the belief that children’s ideas are worthy of careful study and deep consideration, that what they think and feel is not just important but critical to how our societies function.

Additionally, Carlina Rinaldi (2001, p.3) asserts that, “...young children are the greatest listeners to the world that surrounds them. They listen to life in all its shapes and colours. They listen to others – adults and peers. They quickly perceive how listening is essential for communication. From the beginning, children demonstrate that they have a voice, know how to listen and want to be listened to by others. Sociability is not taught to children: they are social beings.”

3

Children's fluency in a range of art media helps others see and hear their ideas



If we want to know children’s ideas, we have to offer them ways to make their ideas visible. This is why we chose to invite artists to work with children and partner with educators. Artists bring a particular skill set with various materials and mediums as well as other ways of seeing and engaging with the world that can support children in sharing their ideas in many ways; ie: though clay, wire, paint, sculpture, movement, sound, etc.

The first step in knowing children’s ideas and hearing their voices is by giving them the tools and materials to communicate their thinking. The arts are a perfect way to do this.

WHAT DID WE DO?

For three years, from 2013-2015, with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, MCRC explored the idea of integrating three visual artists into a variety of our licensed childcare and EarlyON programs. Over the three years, we had many successes including shifts in thinking and teaching practices, shifts in how art materials were viewed and used with young children, pedagogical documentation created by artists and educators that gave visibility to children's ideas, children's growth in using materials for communication as well as positive feedback from those involved; educators, artists, children, parents and the community. We concluded these three years with our first Exhibit held at the Harrop Gallery in Milton.



Throughout 2013-2015, we learned many things including the importance of quality materials and access to them for young children, continuity that enables relationships among children, families, educators and artists to be built over time, sharing our work and thinking with others, side-by-side mentoring in the classroom for educators and most importantly, time outside of the classroom for artists and educators to have facilitated conversation where they could reflect on their observations and practices and make plans for next steps together.

Building on our successes and the learnings of everyone involved in the first phase of ACT, we submitted and were successful in obtaining funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation for another 3 years.

This gave us the opportunity to:

1

Grow the ACT initiative into more programs in MCRC (9 programs over 3 years) as well as into the Oakville community through a partnership with Oakville Parent Child Centre (3 programs over 3 years).



2

Build community awareness of the ACT initiative through promotional materials, social media outlets and community events.



What follows in this document is based on our successes, challenges, learnings and reflections during the second phase of ACT, from 2016-2018. We discuss the process we employed, the learnings we gained and our recommendations to other organizations that are curious about engaging in this type of work.

HOW DID WE DO IT?

Had a Dedicated Project Lead



- ACT Coordinator solely focused on achieving the grant objectives and communicating/maintaining the vision.
- Provoked educators and artist's thinking through offering questions for reflection, article and video discussions, book studies, and a variety of other resources.

Built Capacity

- ACT Coordinator trained and mentored PT ACT Lead (MCRC) and FT ACT Facilitator (OPCC).



Co-Constructed the Model



- ACT Coordinator observed and listened carefully to educators, artists, children, families, the community and other colleagues so that decisions were well thought out and based on participant's experiences and feedback while still maintaining the overall vision.

Recruited & Integrated Artists

- Recruited and integrated local artists into Licensed Childcare and EarlyON Programs
- Through invitation, artists were partnered with educator teams and visited once a week for a few hours for a period of 6+ months in the same program.
- All artists met together once a month with the ACT Coordinator for training/mentoring/collaboration.



Met Weekly



- Ran weekly 1 hour facilitated Artist-Educator meetings
- Supply educators covered program educators to attend meeting with artist and facilitator.
- Meeting content included: studying documentation (photos, videos, notes, stories), using protocols for reflection, planning next steps, reading and discussing articles/books, etc.

Pedagogical Documentation

- Artists & Educators Created and Displayed Pedagogical Documentation
- Documentation was made available for families, the community and colleagues to read and engage with.



Purchased Materials



- Purchased quality art materials/resources
- In addition to art materials and books, laptops for creating documentation were purchased as well as 1 high quality digital camera for each program with an artist. The artist and educators shared the use of the camera for documentation purposes.

Engaged the Community

- 4 Adult Art Nights (2 in 2017 and 2 in 2018).
- 4 Educator Art Nights (2 in 2017 and 2 in 2018).
- 2 Exhibits (1 in Milton in 2017 for 3 weeks, and 1 in Oakville in 2018 for 6 weeks).
- PL Experience for Community Educators on Sept. 29th, 2018 from 9:30-2:30 in collaboration with consultant Lorrie Baird entitled 'Deepening our Understanding of Classroom Research: Reflections from the ACT initiative.'
- Offered art experiences at various community events such as Culture Days 2017, Country Heritage Park Summer Fair and Farm Expo, MCRC Fall Family Festival, and more.
- Created a webpage www.mcrc.on.ca/act-initiative to share information about ACT, the vision, documentation, artist bios, community events and more.
- Posted a variety of ACT related content on Facebook and Twitter.
- Created a pull-up banner for display at events, as well as postcards, to engage people visually in learning about what ACT is.



Studied ACT's Impact



- Created a process for studying ACT's impact
- Artists/Educators created and maintained portfolios as well as answered reflective questions every 4 months.
- All educators/artists part of ACT also came together every 4 months to explore art materials and create representational art pieces reflecting their growth.
- Surveys emailed to Art Night participants to gather their feedback and reflections.
- Reflective questions offered to the community at the Exhibits and PL Session that invited people to share their thinking after experiencing our work.

Consulted with Leaders

- Consulted with pedagogical leaders in the field of ECE
- Worked with Karyn Callaghan (2016) and Lorrie Baird (2017-2018)



"I have learned that children's perspectives are meaningful and unique."

-Educator

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Throughout 2016-2018, we gathered data in a variety of ways from educators, artists, families, adults and educators in the community as well as other community members. We did this through educator/artist portfolios (which included their written notes, documentation, photos of children, work and their classroom environment, art supply orders, research, etc.), reflective questions, photos and surveys.

Educator/Artist Learnings (Impacting Children and Families)

ROLE

THINKING



Dispositions that are Important:

- Open Mindedness
- Collaborative (with children and adults)
- Deep Thinker
- Thoughtful/Reflective
- Co-Learner

Actions that are Important:

- Listening
- Observing
- Slowing Down
- Stepping Back and Thinking Before Jumping In
- Building Children's Competencies with Materials
- Building Meaningful Connections with Families
- Partnering With instead of Supervising Children
- Allowing Children to Lead



DOING



Visible Practices - Classroom:

- Asking children intentional questions
- Engaging with children in play
- Making changes to the physical environment and materials
- Introducing new ideas based on reading literature (ex: Ann Pelo book)
- Giving children choices
- Providing opportunities for risk-taking
- Connecting with parents (to gather more info related to a classroom experience/observation)
- Engaging in research

Visible Practices - Documentation & Planning:

- Telling stories of children's experiences (majority; more than just recounting an event)
- Creating a board to show process, ideas, questions
- Telling stories with photos; not generic; more focused (ex: showing an individual child, two children or a small group, versus a large group from a distance)
- Noticing/Capturing relationships
- Showing children's competencies (more in depth; more than just an ELECT indicator)
- Including photos of children's work
- Writing notes in the classroom (evidence of observation)
- Using "I wonder" statements
- Reflecting on an experience and attempting to make meaning of it; Interpretation
- Building on observations
- Creating titles for documentation that are more focused (for some)

VIEW OF CHILDREN

- Deep Thinkers
- More Capable and Competent than we often think
- Empathetic
- Strong Communicators
- Relational
- Purposeful/Thoughtful

“I definitely view the children as deeper thinkers and explorers than before. I take more time to appreciate the children’s thoughts and processes in a more meaningful way which influences my view of children as being more curious and capable than I had previously thought.”

-Educator

ART MATERIALS

“I have learned that children use materials to communicate everything in their world; feelings, family and friend relationships, what and who they know, how things work... they use materials to better understand and explain/communicate their knowledge and interests.”

-Educator

- Repetition is Important and Necessary
- Children Need Access to Quality Art Materials
- Process and Exploration is Important
- Children Value the Open Ended Use of Quality Materials
- Children use Materials to Build Relationships with Others
- Children use Materials to Communicate what they Think, Feel and Know

What Helped to Shift Educators/Artists Thinking & Practices?

- 1hr Meetings (TIME to Reflect)
- Collaboration; Hearing Multiple Perspectives
- Working Alongside an Artist in Program
- Studying Documentation/Utilizing Protocols
- Engaging in Research
- Having Access to Quality Materials/Resources
- Art Nights
- Creating a Portfolio

“I don't need to be in control. I've learned that children are capable and strong leaders.”

-Educator

“Having an outside person (artist) come in with a different view and new ideas, as well as reflecting as a team each week were the most important to me. It makes a huge difference when you are able to discuss what is going on in the classroom and also hearing someone else’s perspective on situations because sometimes others see it in a way you would never think of.”

-Educator

The Community (Adults, Parents and Educators) is Thinking About:

CHILDREN/BEING WITH CHILDREN

- Their View of Children/Children's Competencies
- Personal Interactions/Approaches with Children
- Use of Time
- Collaboration
- Offering Different/New Materials
- Allowing for Exploration
- Importance of Stepping Back and Observing
- Engaging in Research/Documentation
- Taking Time to Reflect
- Engaging Colleagues/Families in reflective/Research Conversations
- Practicing Using Protocols
- Asking Questions

"I left with the strengthened feeling of how important it is to allow children ample time when working with art materials."
-Educator Art Night Participant

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS WITH ART

- Childhood Memories/Connections
- Ambitions
- Emotional Connections
- Inspiration
- Impact of Art on Mental Health (ie: Relaxation)
- Attending more Art Nights
- Receiving Guidance from Artists with Art Materials
- Social Relationships



Visual Art Materials and Book Ideas

MATERIALS



DRAWING

- Pencils and Erasers
- Black Fineliners
- Chalk Pastels and Watersoluble Oil Pastels
- Charcoal (varying kinds; willow, compressed, vine) + Tools (tortillons and kneaded erasers)
- Black and colored India Ink (for older children)
- Cardstock (black and white)
- Mixed Media Paper
- Plain White Copy Paper



PAINTING

- Liquid Watercolour Tubes (primary colours; can mix new colours)
- Non-Toxic Acrylic Paint (primary colours plus black and white)
- Liquid Tempera (primary colours plus black and white)
- Round and Flat Paintbrushes in varying thicknesses
- Paint Palettes
- Clear Squeeze Bottles (for liquid tempera paint)
- Watercolour Paper
- Large Fabric Rolls (broadcloth, crinoline, etc.)
- Mural Paper



SCULPTURE

- Cone 6 White Clay or Gray Stoneware Clay + Tools (clay cutters and hydra sponges)
- Wire in varying gauges (ex: copper wire) + Tools (pliers)

RESOURCES

ADULT BOOKS

- *The Language of Art* by Ann Pelo
- *In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia* 2nd Edition
- *Children, Meaning-Making and the Arts* Edited by Susan Wright
- *Mosaic of Marks, Words, Material* by Reggio Children
- *The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter: The Uses of Storytelling in the Classroom* by Vivian Gussin Paley
- *Children, Clay and Sculpture* by Cathy Weisman Topal
- *Documenting Children's Meaning: Engaging in Design and Creativity with Children and Families* by Jason Avery, Karyn Callaghan and Carol Anne Wien

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- *Happy* by Mies Van Hout
- *The Noisy Paint Box: The Colors and Sounds of Kadinsky's Abstract Art* by Barb Rosenstock
- *Swatch: The Girl Who Loved Color* by Julia Denos
- *A Line Can Be...* by Laura Ljunhkvist
- *What Do You Do With An Idea?* by Kobi Yamada
- *Sky Colour* by Peter Reynolds
- *The Dot* by Peter Reynolds
- *Lines That Wiggle* by Candace Whitman



WHAT DO WE RECOMMEND TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS?

Create and Maintain a Clear Vision

It's critical to have leadership that understands the vision and is committed to growing it, while still being flexible and revising processes as learnings arise.



Offer Choice

Invite people to participate instead of telling or delegating.

This leads to deeper engagement and ultimately sustained change.



Invite & Listen to Multiple Perspectives and Voices

Be receptive to the input of those who are part of the project. Listen carefully to what is working well, what could be improved upon and/or what could be done differently and then revise your processes accordingly.

Let the participants and those invested in the project shape its direction while still maintaining the overall vision.



Work with Artists who are Committed to Learning and Practicing Your Pedagogical Approach

It's worth spending extra time and care in recruiting the 'right' artists; Ones that are open to your values and beliefs of working with children, families and the community.

Since the artists are the ones who work directly side-by-side with the educators in the classroom, it's critical that they are introducing materials, ideas and approaches that are congruent with your beliefs as an organization. Take time to train and mentor, on an ongoing basis, all of your artists, continually inviting them into reflective conversations around their practice in the classroom.



Nurture Useful Dispositions

Decide upon and name useful dispositions (ex: curiosity, open-mindedness, collaborative, reflective, etc.) and then ensure your process works to nurture those dispositions.

Skills can more easily be taught. Dispositions require strategic thinking so that you either intentionally look for and hire people with the dispositions that are important to you, and/or your process (the way you do things, make decisions, etc.) nurtures and builds those dispositions in your people.



Embrace Time

Time is critical – time for reflection, planning, thinking with others, collaborating, studying work, etc. Educators especially need time, processes and practices that will help them think together and reflect deeply on their work with children. Don't rush things or expect change to happen overnight. Embrace and allow time for the journey.



WHAT DO WE RECOMMEND TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS?

Ensure Strong Facilitation

Strong facilitators are essential in helping people clarify their thinking, challenging and provoking them, offering other perspectives or resources, focusing conversations, work and ideas, utilizing protocols, etc.



Purchase Quality Materials and Resources

This could happen either through additional funding or rethinking how a current budget is being spent and reallocating money differently or making changes to what is purchased.



Explore Art Materials as Adults

Provide time for adults to play with art materials through guided yet open ended explorations and provocations for reflection.

This helps adults gain comfort with a material which in turn increases the likelihood that they will offer that material to children and invite them to explore it.



Offer Side-By-Side Mentoring

This happened for many through an artist in program – it could also happen through another type of curriculum mentor.

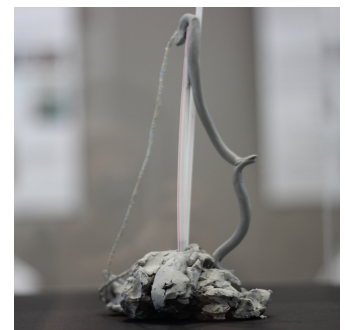
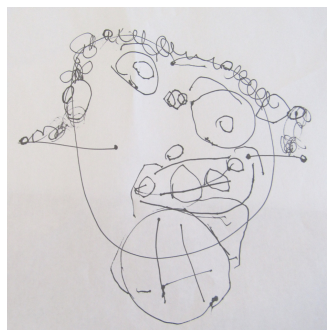
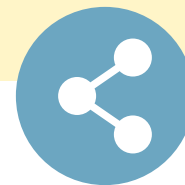
In classroom side-by-side work is essential as it gives educators a chance to reflect and be challenged during their work; couple this with time outside their classroom to reflect and you have a holistic approach to reflection.



Share Your Work

Share your work outside of the organization so that others can think about it and reflect on it also ie: through exhibits, presentations, workshops, art nights, etc.

This invites multiple perspectives which is useful for those that produced the work but it also invites others to think about their own beliefs/practices and through provocations and invitations, could help people shift what they think, say and do.





To learn more about ACT, please visit:
mrcr.on.ca/act-initiative