

The City Classroom

Artist – School Peer Mentoring Programme 2020/21

Ash Field Academy in partnership with Louise Katerega

COMPLETED ACTIVITY PLAN & COMMENTARY

INTRODUCTION

“I started this as a working document to help me/us plan, knowing it would shift and develop as we went....then realised adding commentary to it would allow me to keep track of what had or hadn't happened, how and what thoughts arose...I share the first version of this document (also originally shared to Marissa Blisset, Project Co-ordinator) as a measure of 'distance travelled' ”

LOUISE KATEREGA, April 2021

Key Personnel

Jess Norman, Head of Arts, Ash Field Academy [Home | Ash Field Academy](#) specialist academy for pupils with SEND

Louise Katerega, Independent (Creative) Dance Artist & Arts Consultant <http://www.footinhand.co.uk/Biography.html> Associate Producer for Change, People Dancing <https://www.communitydance.org.uk/about-people-dancing/people>

Ashfield SLT

Ashfield WLT

The City Classroom, Marissa Blissett

Summary of Mentoring Project Activity

- 10 hours of contact time between school and artist INCLUDING artists admin, prep and writing time
- A mentoring or co-mentoring approach
- A focus on resilience in the face of and recovery from this period under COVID 19
- Clear and lasting benefits to school and staff involved in terms of their own resilience and creative confidence

Summary of Ash Field Project Activity

Jess and Louise connected for an introductory meeting (*NOT part of the 10 hours*) to look together at Ash Field's Expression of Interest, get Louise's response to it and flesh it out into a potential plan for SLT, WLT and artists connected to the school to enhance and firm up with their input.

In response to the academy's initial EOI and the COVID 19 restrictions we decided on a **series of online meetings and work in between** where apt by Louise totalling 10 hours

MAIN GOAL: Make a plan together for the long-term future of arts and creativity at Ash Field which links the school with appropriate artists and companies with whom to make long term relationships threaded through with a commitment to equity and diversity, connecting with ethnically diverse artists and disabled role models; operating with anti-racist and anti-ableist principles.

Aims, Roles & Responsibilities

Ashfield wanted to

- Capitalise on Louise's extensive local, national and international links cross arts including specialists with young disabled people
- Capitalise on Louise's lived experience and knowledge around diversity and inclusion in their broadest senses
- Facilitate links for the school with exciting (and where we can disabled role model) artists and companies to make long term relationships with
- Set up meetings with some of these artists in Zoom meetings if apt; certainly help Ash Field enhance its database of people and connections in the arts

Commentary

All of this above was achieved through the sharing of a database of disabled artists (cross artform though mainly dance & theatre as school had contacts in music, art and film) adapted from one Louise had already compiled for other/previous work so took less of this project time.

Jess wished to receive

- General 1 to 1 support in arts management and personal leadership encouragement from Louise with a coaching approach
- Support with delegating so team is able to use its individual and collective powers more efficiently and Jess has time, scope, energy and liberty to keep pursuing more and more exciting ideas and interesting external relationships

Commentary

Whilst this was the subject of early conversation, Jess, in my view always showed confidence as a leader throughout the process.

Things on the leadership/management front for her were shifted by the early meeting with the group of 3 musicians who already have a fairly long-established practice at the school.

Buried feelings and opinions about the history and future of the arts in the school were brought to light by my presence as a neutral outsider asking questions and though challenging for Jess, in follow up meetings with her team, ultimately these were viewed positively as an opportunity to better understand each individual opinion about the place of arts in the school.

One artistic voice had dominated in the meeting I attended and this opened the door to others who had taken up less space there, finding it in one to one's with Jess. This turned out to be a major watershed moment for them as a team and I believe, created time they did not know they had been missing to discuss as well as do together.

Jess, who usually organises artistic events, yet does not always get to enjoy being part of them, I believe enjoyed the beginnings of her collaboration with the artists she chose to meet Lisa and Dave. In a way, we moved towards a negotiated commissioning model of curating workshops for Ash Field with them, rather than buying a workshop or show 'off the peg.' ***We had talked about internal support for Jess from the existing arts team, however, in retrospect I wonder if what we began here was external support for Jess from experienced artists – and indeed a more creative, producer-style input for the artists from a school, where they were more involved in the overall direction of the school and the pupil's lives/ambitions.***

In response to the academy's initial EOI and the COVID 19 restrictions we decided on **a series of online meetings and work in between** where apt by Louise totalling 10 hours

Achieved. Indeed, largely due to its roots in discussion and planning, we were the only project it eventually transpired which managed to continue despite lockdown.

Together with Louise some other original aims were to

- Generate between us a few useful documents e.g. How To Work with Artists; How to Work with Ash Field to set up best practice protocols for mutual success, healthy communication and equitable practices
- End the project with a celebration live if we can, online if not- exact nature tbc; will reveal itself as we (and lockdown!) go
- Gain confidence and knowledge in threading throughout all activity a commitment to diversity, equality, equity, inclusion driven by anti-racist and anti-ableist principles

Commentary

It became clear time would be too short to generate documents of our own and we were happy to prioritise the finding of artists. Louise to ask Spark for any examples contracts between Special schools of these to pass on Ash Field, however.

It also became clear as lockdown continued a celebration would not be possible and besides since our focus was making a plan to execute in the near future, the end point of our work together was in fact the meeting with SMT towards the end of the project, hopefully confirming it and approval for its budget.

Key Points on Ash Field School Horizon

National Poetry Day - injecting joy into this; making sure all students verbal and not, have an authentic contribution, feel and demonstrate their 'voice'

Commentary

This was not something that was going to take place during the scope of our project, but identified in our first meeting as a yearly event Ash Fields two streams of non-verbal and PMLD pupils struggle to access. It was discussion of this issue which prompted the sign-posting and eventual meeting with poet and theatre director, Dave Young, who is non-verbal. (Louise had worked with Dave on a dance project in 2012 and kept pace with this developing career)

Ash Fest – Every summer; this will have more ethnically diverse artists, companies and activities; more disabled role models

Commentary

Ash Field are running Ash Fest online this year and the plan discussed at SMT was to commission Dave and Lisa Simpson, the non-verbal choreographer identified through our project to contribute artistically and with a presentation/interview about their journey from Special School pupils to the independent adult artists they are now.

TIMETABLE

Commentary

- we decided early we need not meet or have an event every week, just touch base regularly throughout the next 3 months.
- we had 11 weeks to spread our 10 hours over which gave us great options to work intensively or little and often as required
- as with many projects I have experienced we spent 1/3 of our time doing rich and through prep using our hours quite closely together with Louise doing lots of taking information and needs plus discussion of these with Jess
- over the middle of the project there was less direct contact and time spent separately with Louise gathering information giving way to Jess making decisions about it which Louise then acted on
- we set the idea for the 'apex' of the project as a presentation of a plan for the arts at Ash Field (ideally short. medium and long-term) to be shared with at least SLT if not the rest of the school, very near the end, with perhaps just one or two sessions remaining to tie of loose ends and close
- Louise created the timetable below in the early weeks with **Key Points of the Project Horizon** marked in approximately on particular weeks to make sure we managed our time effectively with precise detail filled in as we went along
- as things transpired, **the key moment in timetabling was setting up our meeting with SLT in mid -March back in mid-January** - once this was in place the rest of the project fell into place around it i.e., we knew the choosing and meeting with artists would have to happen a few weeks before for us to present a prospective future arts plan to the headteacher
- we did not account for every one of our 10 hours straight away – rather we had a sense of how many we might need for our early and late stages leaving the middle flexible. This served us very well.

DATE & TIME	LOCATION	ACTIVITY	NOTES
Preparatory Meeting 18 th December 2020	Teams	Personal introductions: Jess expanding on brief and LK beginning to float ideas to fulfil it	It was great to have this gap for thinking between this first contact and first official meeting
Meeting 1 -Monday 11 th January (1 hr 30 min) (+30 min writing up)	Teams	Group Planning Meeting Jess, Louise, Dan, Adele, Neil	Arrange another group meeting to include team members who couldn't make this time slot Happened with Jess
Meeting 2 - 25 Monday 25 th January (30 min) Research by Friday 29 th January (1 hour)	Teams Offline	1 to 1 meeting Jess and Louise Louise research artists and companies	 NB I was using and adapting contacts I had previously gathered for other work so this took less time
Mon 1 February Meeting 3 – Tue 9 February (1 hour)	Offline Teams	Jess considering resources and artists sent by Louise Louise & Jess catch up	Choose some artists or companies to meet direct over Zoom during this time – Jess found this easy as she was so clear about pupils needs; the idea of disabled role models took precedence for her Discuss chosen artists, map out remainder of project Achieved
w/c 15 th February – w/c 1 March Research/brokering (30 mins)	Email/phone	Louise contact Jess' chosen artists: Lisa Simpson (dance/choreography). Dave Young (Theatre/Spoken Word). Sima Gonsai (Flim)	Lisa Simpson Inclusive Dance (simpsonboard.co.uk) The Shouting Mute – Inclusive Writer, Theatre-Maker, and Performance Artist Sima Gonsai (simagonsaifilms.com)
Monday 8 March Meeting 4 – LK and artist (1 hour)	Zoom	LK preparation for meeting with Lisa	Work out screen shares, give Lisa context for school Saving as much time as possible for communication was key
Thurs 11 March Meeting 5 – LK, artists & Ash Field (1 hr 30 min)	Zoom (recorded by Jess)	Lisa & Dave meet with Jess hosted/brokered by Louise	Artists gave permission to record; Jess took some screen shots of the

			zoom as important to show to students
Check-in meeting & Meeting 6 – LK & JN 30 mins	Zoom	Louise, Jess & Marisa Blissett	Spoke about activities and ‘arc’ of project; checked in on format of case study/evaluation, onward relationship
Meeting 7 - Wed 17 March (1 hour 30 min)	Teams	Jess & Louise meet with Headteacher & SLT	Jess
Meeting 8 Friday 19 March (30 min)	Zoom	LK prep/context meet with Sima	Sima and Jess were linked by email to make own meeting. Since Sima was non-disabled and both she and Jess used to such meetings, we chose to spend our time on the non-verbal artists who were both experienced with schools but we knew would need more of it to really communicate to their optimum with Jess.

TOTAL TIME = 10 hours

Some Final Comments & Conclusions

This project is probably – on the surface - one of the most time-limited and yet the most satisfying I have ever been involved with. And what continues to strike me is how economical it was on time, money and practical effort. Where did it all go right?!

Strong foundations: though the project lasted only 10 hours there were many, many years’ experience brought to each one of them. Spark’s in knowing how to set up the relationships; Jess’ as a teacher who already had a strong leadership role in her school; my 20+ years in the (currently, sadly) very narrow fields of disabled professional artists and networks of global majority artists

Pro-active partnership from the school: Jess was a truly pro-active partner in the project, it was clearly a priority and she readily took the lead a school has to for an artist in terms of driving the project within the school – arranging meetings with others, following up etc; the end goal of the project was a meeting with money attached to it that was highly likely to end in action/change

Timing: COVID-19 necessitated a discussion-based project and encouraged remote/between session independent working. And yet the results were still concrete and practical. Perhaps the drive to somehow produce something tangible because we were not working face to face in the usual way was stronger? Jess spoke of the value COVID had brought of ‘stopping’ (to address and go deeper into things we usually wouldn’t) and how that had solved niggling problems that had been there for a while. For me the project drew out aspects of being an artist that were not to do with creating art, but all that I knew about how art gets made (by

whom and for whom) which is still important. I don't think I have ever isolated or named that aspect of being an artist before. What courage, post-COVID, might we take forward as schools and artists to 'do' less and 'stop and think' more -having made the important discovery that this need not prevent action or change. Indeed might it be a more effective and economical route to it than always 'doing/making'.

Shared values: it was clear from the first meeting Jess and I had similar views on the education of disabled young people, the importance of disabled and ethnically diverse role models. This speeded us on I believe and helped over Teams/Zoom etc where rapport is harder to build. For Ash Field, there was simply a knowledge gap as to where to look for these role models.

Clear ends, flexible means: we had the very clear goal of improving the arts at Ash Field and making a plan by the end of the project. We were happy to discover how to do that across the project rather than fixate about how it might be done, trusting our own judgement to guide us as we gained knowledge. I believe this gave us the right balance of freedom and containment to get the work done.

It perhaps does not sound very exciting on the surface or on paper but it really was to be involved. I felt it got to the heart of some fundamental issues schools indeed arts in schools have, needing real cultural change to address them.

Final observations:-

FOR CITY CLASSROOM/SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS GONG FORWARD

- This project ostensibly **treated a school like a venue/organisation a whole entity in itself to be programmed for. This, rather than perhaps the usual model of thinking of it as a group of children to be taught or entertained. It treated the artistic lead in the school not just as educator but strategist and creative producer.** I was there to model an approach to leadership and change not just provide activity. Is this worth doing elsewhere? Is it a service Spark could provide? How specific was it to my skills (being an ex-Creative Partnerships Creative Agent did not harm!)? Could other artists/producers/trainee producers do it? Do schools – especially special schools? – need to think like/be like programmers? This speaks to the intrinsic value of and proper understanding of the arts – they are not just an aid to learning other subjects, or entertainment – they are strategies for life, for education itself, they can be dynamically employed. Jess and the music team were very passionate about this. Not just using the arts as a means to an end. Also role models when it comes to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion are vital in this
- It wasn't stated in the EOI but there was a real passion for Equity, Diversity, Equality and Inclusion at the school – especially the latter. Is there any value to asking a question about this or drawing it out more on EOIs to Spark in general? E.g. It might generate some data about where the gaps are in diversity of provision across the city? Curating for/with a school could be especially useful for building databases of ethnically diverse and disabled artists? Would it also encourage artists to start promoting each other more; taking notice of what each other does; proactively build their own networks?

ABOUT COMMUNICATIONS ON THE PROJECT

- The EOI only scratched the surface. Conversation and the questions asked in that preparation meeting were really crucial or were for me. I am interested to see if this has been the same for others; **I continue to believe that human conversation is where what really is needed emerges**
- Similarly, with the group meeting with the current musical team – having an outsider without the burden on an ongoing managerial relationship with that person created freer speech, unearthing issues that might not have been raised otherwise **NB it was vital however that those issues were picked up and dealt with skilfully by Jess as the on-going manager**

- Jess very articulate insight into how pupils are streamed according to communication needs in the school, having a ‘whole school’ approach, insight and direct contact with SLT was very positive for me.
- I hope having an arts specialist to back up/externally validate Jess’ ideas and views made a difference to her and in meetings
- **Lots of this project has been about ‘back up’ – as much about back up as leadership – or being agile between the two:** validating each other’s ideas in meetings, and outsider saying ‘yes I see it too’; mentoring partners giving each other credibility in their respective worlds; and for me with the non-verbal artists in the meeting back up and support to the communications of the non-verbal artists (i) to relay context and details of their work at a good speed for a teacher’s available time (ii) to model the practicalities of communicating with them as I was familiar with their communication systems from past work. It is so much easier to demonstrate than explain – especially with an experienced, astute professional in the field such as Jess.

TIME AND MONEY

- **10 hours was fine for us**– it did however rely on the adage of a bit of an experienced person goes a very long way, that goes for me, Jess, artists
- I chose to sub-contract Dave and Lisa and pay them £50 each from my fee for them to attend the meeting. This was a personal choice and followed practice for freelancers under lockdown I had seen elsewhere.

ABOUT THE SATISFACTIONS OF THE PROJECT

- There was a beautiful fruition of many years work in what Jess and I dubbed ‘our favourite zoom of all lockdown’ 😊 with Dave and Lisa. It was very moving for me to witness **the culmination of 4 actual lifetime’s work** for each of us...and, given Dave and Lisa will soon be meeting the Ash Field students, the beginning of who knows who else’s!!
- Jess and I emerged very proud that we made this project work and got through it during lockdown....**would we ever have thought of it without COVID 19 hanging over us? It solved a problem that’s always been there with schools (programming) but schools/artists just didn’t think to address separately** was about the useful things that happen when we stop “doing the doing”....and do a bit more of the thinking and laying ground. We focus a lot on the reaping, and maybe sometimes we enjoy or notice the sowing....this was really taking time preparing the ground, finding the right seed, skilling the farm up. That surely is a lesson for longevity.



Philharmonia



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