



A Creative Partnerships Manchester Salford and Centre for Urban Education, Manchester Metropolitan University Action Research Programme developed with Andrew Vaughan, The Whitworth Art Gallery, Medlock Primary School and Gorton Mount Primary School, Manchester.



Photo: Anne Worthington

The gallery is where I come to dream and discover new things. My journal is a place that I can look back through to remember what I was thinking. All my thoughts are kept together in one place, my place, they are my ideas.  
Year 3 pupil. Gorton Mount Primary School

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Manchester Salford Action  
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Manchester.**



**Action Researcher**

Andrew Vaughan, The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester.

**Research Timescale**

June 2007 – April 2008

**Research Question**

How can regular exposure to an art gallery support reflection, personalised learning and independent thinking in the transition from Year 2 -3?

**Research Partners and Sample Groups**

Medlock Primary School and Gorton Mount Primary School

Medlock Primary School were selected to inform my research as they have already established a creative approach to personalised reflection through the method of learning journals and are familiar with working with the collections and spaces at the Whitworth Art Gallery. In contrast the children and teachers at Gorton Mount Primary School were new to this approach.

My sample research group included eight Year two pupils whom I tracked into Year three. Representing an equal gender split, four children from each school were chosen to include a range of differing academic abilities. Ability is defined by teacher assessment of the pupils.

**Research Methods and  
Project Description**

The methodology used for my enquiry follows a typical action research cycle of planning, delivery and evaluation. Evidence to support the enquiry question was collected through the learning journals, memory drawings, questionnaires, timed observations, pupil, practitioner and teacher comments, photographs and paired pupil interviews.

The research was conducted at the gallery in two six week blocks. A baseline study to observe and record how the children used the gallery and their journals was delivered in summer term 2007. The project was repeated again in the Autumn to measure and assess any change.

Both schools visited the gallery together and took part in joint workshops with three artist practitioners in drama, dance and the visual arts. These artists along with a partner learner from the other school, the gallery spaces and the learning journals were constant familiarities to the children during their progression from Year two to three.

The different spaces, artworks and exhibitions at the gallery aimed to offer a reflective thinking environment for children to digest their week learning both in their mind and in their learning journals. As a place to record ideas and thoughts, the children took their learning journal to all three workshop sessions and had the freedom of when and how they used them.

Each week, I observed and interviewed the pupils to see how they responded to the physical space of the gallery and recorded in what ways they had used their journals. At the end of each session the children were asked to make a memory drawing that represented something they had learned, thought about or remembered on that day. I questioned each child at the time of drawing and three months later to see if time had altered the meanings.



**Research Aims and Hypothesis**

I am interested to explore how an art gallery space can support creative learning and reflection at Key Stage One and whether a learning journal might document or evidence this. I wanted to observe if regular visits to an art gallery had any impact on children in their transition from KS1 – 2.

The idea of a learning journal was introduced to encourage personal ownership and also become a constant in the children's progression from Year two to three. During the project children had the opportunity to spend time working within all the public gallery spaces at the Whitworth. These range from open plan galleries to more enclosed exhibition space.

- What impact do regular repeated visits to an art gallery have on children?
- Can KS1 children recognise a gallery environment as a stimulus for reflection and learning?
- What does a personal learning journal mean to young children and how can it support the transition from Year two to year three?
- Can creative activity and a dedicated time and space to think help children digest their own learning?
- What does independent research look like in KS1 children?
- Can children view their own drawing as reflective thinking and creative evaluation?

**Research Findings**

- When children made connections with the experience of a gallery space, activity or artworks that had personal or cultural significance they talked with more clarity and enthusiasm than usual and wanted to share their experience with others. These moments were often recorded as memory drawings in their learning journals and remained as vivid to the children three months on as at the time.
- Low academic achievers made more connections with an experience, activity or space. Higher achievers were more likely to connect with individual artworks.
- Children responded positively to having a regular time and place to reflect on their learning. They perceived that repeated reflective practice helped them gain increased confidence and independence as they became more familiar with the surroundings and what to do.
- All children used drawing and writing as a way to record thoughts. The drawings often had more significance than the written word.

**“A SPACE TO THINK  
How can regular exposure to an art  
gallery support reflection, personalised  
learning and independent thinking in  
the transition from Year 2–3? ”**

Andrew Vaughan, The Whitworth Art Gallery

**Conclusions**

The key conclusions to date:

- The freedom to discover and the range of visual and experiential stimuli that art gallery environments offer can encourage conditions that support creative reflection and personalised learning in KS1 children.
- Given regular time, a stimulating environment that offers the freedom of movement and choice along with facilitation, task or activity running central, KS1 children can develop basic research skills that assist them in making personal learning connections that remain powerful and meaningful over time.
- Learning journals provide a space for young children to record and reflect their personalised learning connections through drawing and writing. They offer a place that can be of precious value and personal importance to the child, yet the journal can still encourage play, experimentation and allow creative thought to develop without fear or risk of going wrong.
- My action research uses a very small sample group of children that concentrate my findings. These questions will need to be repeated many times with different children and in different locations to see if similar outcomes occur.