

Reflections on Reflect Ami Hallgarth Early Years and primary Coordinator, The Whitworth Art Gallery.

I am really grateful for having been involved in the 'Reflect' programme. Participating has allowed me the freedom to reflect on my own and others personal and professional circumstances without feeling guilty or self-indulgent. It has encouraged me to make connections between very different stages of my life and my current professional career, which has brought about a sense of clarity as well as an increased curiosity. It has also generated a variety of benefits for my work, although in a sense, these seem less significant than what I have gained on a personal level.

My initial motivation for taking part in the programme was to further my professional development, but at the first meeting with my co-mentor, Pat Smith, I quickly realised that the project may bring about personal benefits as well. Pat and I both come from an Art background, although our personal practice had become over-shadowed by our professional commitments. We both agreed that revitalising our personal creativity was something that we wanted to actively pursue and that by keeping sketch-books, we could visually record our progress throughout the project, which may assist in this process. Pat was always very determined that anything that helped us personally would inevitably have a positive ripple effect into our professional life. which was a gentle reminder to me that this was definitely not a 'selfish' thing to be doing, as it would bring about multiple benefits.

When I discovered I'd been paired with a Head teacher. I was initially a little worried that perhaps the pairing was slightly unbalanced, as I felt I did not hold the equivalent status within my organisation, nor have the same strategic powers or level of responsibility. Pat is also older than me, and this could have added to my anxiety, in that her personal and professional experience outweighed mine.

However; Pat has never made me feel inferior in any way and these initial fears were put to rest at a very early stage in our relationship, for which I'm truly grateful. In return, I have realised that I also have a lot to offer to Pat and the equality of our relationship has ultimately increased my own self-confidence. The wealth of topics and information we discussed at the first session had left my head buzzing with ideas. I was so inspired to start creating something that I immediately bought a sketch-book-and started planning how I would use it. I found one of the opening questions, 'Why do you do what you do?' deeply effective on a number of levels. It came as an enjoyable challenge to consider how our personal values, beliefs and choices had impacted on our professional careers. It was also a great way to find out about our co-mentors and the rest of the group and it was a real pleasure discovering the different motivations and stories that people had to share.

Throughout the project, Pat has encouraged me to consider my work-life balance and sustained contact with her means that this has been a constant reminder. Her passion for her work and desire to make time to refocus her own personal creative interests has subsequently had a knock-on effect on me.

I've greatly enjoyed viewing Pat's sketchbook, which in turn, has inspired me to record information in slightly different ways. In return, I have suggested alternative forms of documentation to Pat. One of which was to set 'Creative Challenges' - using visual means to describe the sort of day we've had or what personal circumstance impacted on our work life, etc. We both now keep a daily log, building a 'patchwork', using colour, shape, pattern and occasionally words to document the main events of each day.

I don't always feel able to communicate my thoughts in an articulate manner and sometimes words alone aren't sufficient to describe how I'm feeling. It's been great that Pat and I have a shared dialogue through a more visual means, which is not totally reliant upon words.

In terms of professional development, my co-mentoring relationship with Pat has meant that we've been able to pilot three different sessions with six of her KS2 classes at the gallery. Having Pat's critical and honest feedback has proved extremely useful and our sustained contact means that we can continue to trial new things together. Pat and other staff members have attended twilight CPD events at the gallery and will be holding a whole-school INSET at the gallery in the summer. We will soon bring together the Maths Coordinator and artists from the gallery's Creative Practitioner Team to work collaboratively to develop new sessions that support Numeracy through art-based activities, which will be piloted with pupils, before being added to the gallery's programme.

I included an article, written by Pat, detailing the 'Reflect project, in our Schools Programme. As a result of reading the article and speaking to Pat, Head teachers in Stockport and Tameside schools have become interested in the partnership and are keen to find how they may be able to collaborate in similar ways. It's impossible to say, at this stage, what will happen as a result of this interest, but our enthusiastic advocacy of the project has definitely had a ripple effect and I expect the effects of this project will be far-reaching and long lasting. To conclude, I'd like to add how difficult it's been to edit this down to two pages! Even whilst writing this, new things have occurred to me - forcing me to make connections between my personal and professional life, which in itself has been quite therapeutic. I do hope that 'Reflect' will continue to run in the future, as it's a highly valuable opportunity for people from different sectors to get together and learn not just from one another, bringing with it all the benefits for schools and creative organisations, but also to learn and rediscover things about themselves, which is a deeply rewarding experience.