

Tate has four galleries in the UK, one being Tate Britain which is located on Millbank in the London Borough of Westminster and is the home of British art since 1500 to the present day. From 2009 -2014, Tate Britain's Early Years and Families (EY&F) team led a Big Lottery Funded project called [Big and Small](#), where we worked in partnership with local children's centres and services in Westminster and Lambeth City Councils.

SUMMARY

In 2012/2013 the EY&F team developed the Swatch resource - an object comprising various pieces of materials approximately A6 in size, which can be fanned out or taken apart. It is similar in design to a paint colour or material swatch. On some of the pieces are images of everyday objects or familiar places juxtaposed with images of spaces within Tate Britain. The Swatch includes a piece of orange Perspex, a mirror and some of the images have raised print surfaces. There is a hole in one piece that can act as a viewfinder. Families borrow the Swatch from the information desks at Tate Britain.

The resource was designed to focus on how young children communicate and in particular, how we can support the development of a visual language. An understanding of the gallery as a space was also key in the language development process, and therefore images of the architecture and details of the gallery were used to encourage families to make connections with the site as well as the artworks.

The team considered the needs of the audience and carefully designed the piece ensuring it was practical but also felt comfortable to handle. Artist Abigail Hunt, who developed the resource with the EY&F team, tested prototypes herself as well as with groups she was working with in the gallery at the time. The design took inspiration from items that work for parents/carers with young children, for example buggy attachment toys that can be easily dismantled.



AIMS AND GOALS

For our organisation

The Big and Small project worked towards Tate's organisational aims of engaging with a more diverse, hard to reach local audience. The project strived to achieve this aim in various ways including through:

- taster sessions in community settings
- sustained artist-led projects working with families over six sessions, including a mix of activity off-site and at the gallery
- in-gallery 'bridge' events, which were planned to support families unfamiliar with the gallery whilst encouraging them to visit independently
- large-scale Family Days
- projects to develop resources for families to use in the gallery.

For our audience

All events were designed to support and engage targeted families. The programme was delivered by a panel of artists working in a range of disciplines including sculpture, performance and sound. The project aimed to develop families' confidence and skills to access Tate's sites and collection, and to encourage participation in cultural activity as a family, including accessing other cultural venues. The development of accessible resources was one way to achieve this for targeted families, who included families that have experienced temporary housing, families who have low literacy levels or for whom English is not their first language, ethnic minorities, foster families, and families with children experiencing speech and language difficulties and other special educational needs.

OUTCOMES

For our organisation

The finished resource is a beautiful object that, due to its thoughtful design, has continued to be used at the gallery for many years after its initial conception. It has also been used by families who are already familiar and confident with Tate Britain and has allowed them to discover new ways of engaging with the building and collection. The Swatch has also been used as part of the EY&F team's regular Continual Professional Development sessions with early years practitioners 'Early Exchange', some of whom have subsequently used it as part of a self-led gallery visit with their class.

For our audience

Swatch has successfully supported first-time visitors to the gallery over many years. In 2012 it was evaluated with a partner children's centre and their dads group, as well as with a Special Educational Needs group. Interviews with families highlighted their positive experiences of visiting the gallery and mentioned the Swatch as a key factor in this. Families reported that it helped them feel confident in the space, encouraged them to look at artworks, and engaged siblings in the experience too. Many families mentioned how they had transferred learning and ideas into their own environments, encouraging new ways of looking and engaging with familiar surroundings. Some parents reported an improvement in their child's speech when using the resource in the gallery, and that language was transferred to their home settings when communicating with family members.

Early Years toolkit



LESSONS LEARNT

During the resource development process, the artist was also delivering sessions at the gallery with early years groups. Many of her observations of how the children navigated and responded to the space, as well as what they were drawn to, were fed into the final concept. This experience has taught us to request that the artist either works directly with or observes the intended audience they are creating a resource for, to ensure it is appropriate and that the audience's responses can be fed in to the end result. Often, the audience bring their own, potentially unexpected, ways of responding that can impact on the final product.

There was also a key moment before the Swatch was finalised, where we identified the potential for it to be used with children with speech and language difficulties and their families, and so we also involved these families in trialling the Swatch.

TOP TIP

Test and trial resources with your target audience before completing the design process to ensure longevity.

BUDGET

Approximately £25-£30 per Swatch.
Artist fee additional.

FUNDING

The Swatch resource was developed and created as part of the Big and Small project which was funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Swatch resource was embedded in a series of sessions called [Under 5s Explore the Gallery](#). These are regular artist-led events at Tate Britain for families with children under five. Abigail Hunt facilitated the sessions from January-April 2017 and has recorded some of her observations and reflections on the sessions in a case study that features in

Reardon, D., et al (2018) Chapter 9 Teaching a Creative Developmental Approach in the Early Years. London: Sage

This case study was written by Lucy McDonald, Curator, Families and Early Years Learning Programmes.

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