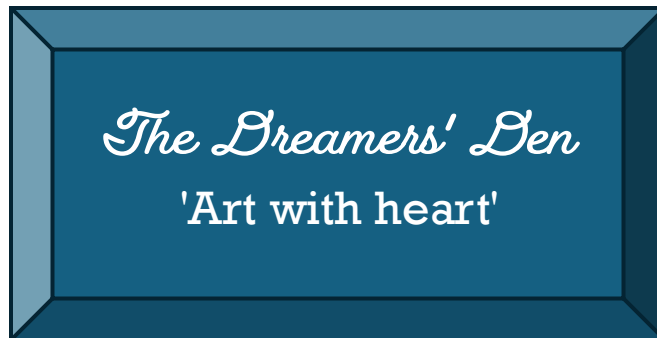




Proposal for an on-site dedicated art and craft space to support children's mental health and wellbeing.



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Project proposal

To provide an on-site dedicated art and craft space, to improve children's mental health and wellbeing, whilst also supporting early child development.

This facility would initially be available to children in Nursery and Reception, but it is expected the facility will be extended to the whole school, once established.

Children will have access to various art resources, encouraging their creativity whilst providing opportunities for relationship building, individual expression and liaison with other community groups. Proposed activities will help children achieve developmental outcomes in an alternative, less intense way to usual academic lessons, increasing their chances of success, whilst freeing their creative talents.

This facility will ideally be based in a spare classroom with the option of working outdoors when weather allows. It is proposed that children be allocated timetabled sessions for use of the art space, during school hours, hence the need for it to be on-site and safely accessible.

Project Name

The art space will be known as 'The Dreamer's Den'. The name reflects the desires and hopes that can be expressed through art and the ability of creative activities to distract us from our worries and enable us to envisage how we would like the world and our lives to be.

Our tag line will be 'Art with heart'. This emphasises that everyone involved will be treated with care, consideration and respect and be expected to show these values to others they encounter, forming the basis for good relationships. It also infers that the project will aim to draw out people's deepest feelings and concerns through the medium of art and craft, hopefully making their emotions and difficulties a little easier to navigate.

Business aims

Within 1 year - Obtain initial funding, set up and resource the area and have it in use for Nursery and Reception children.

Within 3 years - Facility extended to all classes, seeing the benefit to children's mental health and wellbeing reflected in their development. Links made with local community groups, to facilitate sharing of ideas and potential visits by guest speakers.

Within 5 years - All children having regular access to the facility and funding sustained through the sale of small handmade goods, coffee mornings, gallery events, or funding from local businesses. Strong community links made to help prolong the success of the project and to offer opportunities for development to parents/carers and other groups.

Financial summary

This project is primarily of social and cultural value hence financial profit is not our main priority at present.

There will however be an initial start-up cost of around £300 for basic art and craft resources. The school Parent Teacher Association (PTA) will be approached to provide this from the proceeds of cake sales and events such as the Summer Fair.

Some excess supplies from the practitioner's own collection, such as wool, paper and embellishments, will also be provided.

Parents/carers will also be contacted, to see if they can donate simple items such as cardboard boxes, jars and other packaging, for use in junk modelling sessions. Most other equipment is available within school already.

By the second year of provision, it is envisaged 'The Dreamer's Den' will bring in funding from its own events, such as coffee mornings, cake sales and gallery events, whilst also approaching local businesses with community budgets to help.

Elevator Pitch

*The Dreamer's
Den'*

A name that inspires imagination, creativity and expression, allowing children and adults to visualise how they want things to be and believe that anything is possible if we follow our passions.

The strapline 'Art with heart' shows that we put a love of people at the centre of what we do. We aim to show care, kindness and respect to everyone we encounter, and the same values will be expected of children. We will help them learn how to build strong relationships, whilst letting art and craft be a healing, relaxing process for them, allowing them to release their anxieties and inhibitions.

'Art with heart'



A comfortable, safe space for children to express their individuality through the medium of art and craft, whilst developing their existing skills and learning new ones. Activities providing alternative, low stress ways to achieve the required outcomes for their development. An opportunity to build strong relationships with others and to share, discuss and interpret their hopes and fears, knowing that someone will listen and help in the best way they can.



Giving children a different way to succeed and be proud of their work.

Giving children and adults control of what they do and letting them steer their own path, overcoming challenges as they go.

Owner's background

My background is in Early Years, having worked as a Teaching Assistant for 16 years. I have witnessed first-hand the benefits of art and craft on children, particularly those with additional learning needs, helping them come down from emotional outbursts or stressful situations. I have seen how engaging children in artistic pursuits of their interest can unlock potential that otherwise goes un-noticed, leading to them achieving things their teachers never thought possible. It pains me to see how access to artistic resources has dwindled over recent years, due to reduced funding and more focus on academic subjects. This has led to increased pressure and stress for children. The relaxation provided by creative pursuits is so clear to see, that it seems counter-productive to limit children's access to such activities. My early exposure to arts and crafts, enabled me to achieve an 'A' grade in GCSE Art and it is important for children to realise there are many ways they can achieve success, other than purely through academic subjects. Ofsted (2023) states that high quality art education helps children to appreciate and interpret what they see.

In my family, creative skills have been passed down through generations and I have experienced the calming benefits they can have. In 2023, I cared for my Mother through end-of-life care. She was an avid knitter but due to her medication, she eventually lost all capability and memory of how to knit, which was heartbreaking to see. I felt guilty knitting in front of her, but she asked me to continue, and I hope it made her content that she had taught me well. In turn I have also now taught my own children different craft techniques, and we often chat, connecting through crafts. I cannot remember a time when I have not created or sketched and want to share the positive impact of these activities with children from a young age, giving them strategies to deal with the anxiety they will face later in life.

Products and services

Children will have timetabled access to 'The Dreamers' Den' and be introduced to activities aimed at developing their creative skills. They will have chance to interact with like-minded peers and adults. This will develop their speech and communication skills whilst providing opportunities to problem solve and share skills. The internet and academic journals are

awash with articles on the benefits of art and craft. These include:

- Self-expression and individuality
- Self-esteem and confidence building
- Emotional regulation

Self-expression can link to the 'unique child' principle, stated in the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (2021). Positive feedback from peers and adults can increase a child's self-confidence and being fully engaged in an activity can increase concentration, which is a useful skill to transfer to other areas of learning.

The tactile nature of some craft resources can also provide sensory experiences for SEND children, helping them relieve frustrations, whilst group projects can encourage collaboration and social skills. Other benefits include the improvement of fine and gross motor skills and the opportunity to solve problems through sustained shared thinking.

Examples of the activities to be provided in the art space are as follows:



Painting – giving a chance for individual expression.

Life drawing – encouraging observation skills and attention to detail.



Simple origami – helping children to follow instructions accurately.

Clay modelling – a sensory experience, teaching the skill of manipulating materials to achieve a desired effect.



Simple threading – Using pre-punched foam and large needles, to encourage hand-eye co-ordination and fine motor skills.



Bracelet making – encouraging fine motor skills and giving a chance for self-expression through design of own personal colourways and patterns.

The market

Users of the art space will initially be Nursery and Reception children from a primary school on the outskirts of Solihull - a socially and economically disadvantaged area. Once established, services can be extended to the whole school, with the eldest children being 10-11 years. Subject to staff availability, the space may be used at lunchtimes and for provision of after school clubs.

Typically, children live in the surrounding area, and many are from families with low incomes. Poverty will not however affect children's access to 'The Dreamers' Den', as sessions will be run during school hours, with no travel costs or fees for taking part.

The school currently has a more multicultural intake than ever before and parents from a variety of cultures will be approached, to see if they are willing to talk about or demonstrate a craft traditional to their culture. This would provide children with a better understanding and appreciation of the different crafts practiced around the world. As sessions will be during school hours, this may pose a problem for parents who work.

Market research

Desk research has revealed examples of schools where a dedicated art/craft space has already been introduced. The purpose-made spaces allow for central storage of resources, freeing up classroom space and making stock control easier. Children's projects can be left out for longer, allowing them chance to revisit and refine their work if wanted. Both old and new staff can also feel supported by managers of the art spaces, especially if they struggle to think of activities to target a specific outcome. Raising the profile of art in schools can allow participation in art award schemes, gaining accredited status for the school. This would be a good unique selling point when promoting the school to new parents and pupils.

Observations during the owner's 16-year career have highlighted the importance of arts and crafts to children's wellbeing and demonstrated how their development can be improved or enriched by their involvement in artistic pursuits. Benefits witnessed have included distraction from upsetting situations, a calming influence on children prone to volatile behaviour and a way for some children to feel pride in their achievements, where they may feel they have failed or have nothing to contribute to more academic lessons.

Marketing strategy

Marketing and promotion of 'The Dreamers' Den' will take place via school newsletter and the DOJO electronic communication system. Both are existing methods of communication, trusted by parents/carers and accessed regularly. In addition, the owner has good relationships with many parents/carers, through her role as PTA Lead. Many of these people run their own small craft businesses and display their creations at our school events. It is felt they would be good advocates for this venture, and they will be approached to ascertain their willingness to promote our idea to other parties.

Parents are aware of the work we did earlier this month, around Children's Mental Health Week and this would be an ideal time to promote our idea for an art space, linking it to the positive outcomes mentioned in our earlier messages.

Competitor analysis

As this venture is to be undertaken in school time, there will likely be no competitors unless children move to another school. There are art and craft organisations who visit schools to deliver their services, however desk research has found that the fees for this are around £20-£40 per hour or ranging from £240-£350 for half or full day sessions. A service such as this would also only be available for groups of a limited size, meaning that several visits would need to be arranged to ensure the whole school had access. This is an expense that neither the school or its parents/carers could justify at present.

A SWOT analysis of this project has been undertaken, and the owner finds as follows:

Strengths

All children can attend the art space within school time and free of charge. The owner is passionate about this project, meaning she will go above and beyond to see it succeed. The owner already has strong relationships with many of the children and staff within school and has a strong creative background, with skills in many areas of craft and art. The venture is reasonably cheap to set up and could be operational in a short time span. The benefits of art and craft on mental health and wellbeing are well documented and improvements in children's temperaments should be seen quite quickly. Schools with established art spaces have seen the benefits and can testify to their effectiveness.

Weaknesses

There are only three potential areas with a sink, needed for cleaning art equipment and all are used for interventions at present. There is a wooden shed on the playing field which could serve as a base for this project, but resources would have to be transported indoors for cleaning. Also, this space would not be suitable for use in cold weather, due to prolonged exposure to cold causing discomfort for children. Unless intervention groups can be relocated, this may interfere with art space provision.

Opportunities

There are many local organisations who could become involved in this venture, including libraries, church craft groups and a local family run craft store. This store was purposely set up to enable the owner's autistic son to experience the world of work but to with the option to retreat to a quiet space when needed. The owners could provide hope to children in similar situations, showing that they can be a successful member of the work force when they reach adulthood and that there are people who will make adjustments for them. There is also the possibility that children could discover a talent that could lead them to a career in that area.

Threats

Funding may not always be available to continue the project, although this is unlikely as costs are low. If a suitable space cannot be cleared, the project may be delayed or disregarded altogether. If this was to occur, the owner would explore alternative fundraising options to purchase an insulated outdoor building, large enough to accommodate a class comfortably. Senior leadership may decide this project is not feasible and deny permission. If this were to happen, the owner would continue to fight for it, sourcing more evidence of its potential benefit to pupils. Availability of local room hire facilities and the cost of such will be explored, in the hope that an affordable after school craft club could be provided in the local area.

Part 2: Research for business plan

Access to art and crafts for children in schools has seen a decline over recent years, mostly due to cuts in funding. Cooper (2018) states that teachers believe they do not have the skills or resources needed to deliver art lessons effectively. Also, their schools do not value the importance of artistic learning, instead prioritising English and Mathematics. The practitioner has considered these views, suggesting support will be given by art room leaders. Activities to support specific outcomes can be shared with teachers, ensuring consistency across the curriculum and promoting good working partnerships between staff. Feedback will be sought using a consultative approach (O'Sullivan, 2015), ensuring effective communication. Empirical research shows that children engage more when studying art alongside other subjects. Evidence also shows that art can help close the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, highlighting the crucial need for art and crafts within education. Penketh (2017) extols the way art improves children's practical abilities, whilst Broadhead, Thomson and Burns (2022) concur, saying that art lessons teach transferable skills, give a sense of achievement and enable exposure to different areas of knowledge. Access Art (2025) displays exemplars of schools with existing art spaces, and all have nothing but praise for the way they have helped raise the profile of art, whilst simultaneously encouraging good community collaboration.

Children can suffer poor mental health for many reasons, including poverty, feelings of isolation or lack of hobbies (Dahlgren and Whitehead, 2021). The main aim of the art space is to improve children's mental health, and the project addresses these barriers head on by making access free of charge, providing ideas for future hobbies and giving children a chance to interact with others, preventing loneliness. This ensures an inclusive approach for all. New hobbies may mean less time on social media, hence avoiding inappropriate or harmful content, potentially affecting mental state. Rosenberg et al (2019) believe that children who engage in meaningful activities regularly will see improvements in their physical health, mental well-being and learning abilities. A study by Mirante (2021) found that engaging in crafts, children receive a holistic experience, stimulating their mind, body and spirit. These findings align with the benefits mentioned in the practitioner's business plan, for example: problem solving, cultural awareness and experimentation to learn new techniques. These findings are nothing new as Liikanen (1975) believed that when teaching art in schools, conscious efforts should be made to increase children's cultural awareness and experiences. Likewise, the practitioner will embrace the cultures of other school staff, inviting them to discuss or demonstrate a skill from their own background.

There has been some criticism of the reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework in 2020. These reforms are thought to have reduced children's interests to

only those needed to achieve set targets. It is considered that children who attend more experienced settings, would benefit from their expertise in providing a broad and balanced curriculum (Early Arts,2020). Such settings take culture, socio-economic factors and differing developmental rates into consideration, along with other unique challenges faced by individual children and their families. As children learn and express themselves in a myriad of interconnected ways, including those of a cognitive, spiritual and emotional nature, a developmental curriculum approach gives more opportunity for success. Settings that adopt a more rigid framework run the risk of excluding certain children from the outset, due to having pre-determined ideas of culture, rather than appreciating the child's uniqueness and embracing what they have to offer.

According to Yliverronen and Seitamaa-Hakkarainen (2016), children need to handle materials and experiment with tools. This process helps improve their fine motor skills, together with their cognitive abilities, as they will make decisions as to what the resources can be used for and how. The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (2021) mentions the importance of fine motor skills for increasing hand-eye co-ordination, enabling children to be better writers and readers as they move through school. Arts and crafts are ideal for building fine motor skills, through activities such as weaving, or threading. For children to make something of their own, they need to know what the process is, how to achieve it and the purpose behind their actions. In practice, talking a child through the making process can improve their understanding and expand their vocabulary by learning new words in context. Their understanding can then be monitored by asking them to talk through the making process themselves. Sustained shared thinking can be practiced throughout, scaffolding, extending, discussing and modelling where appropriate, dependent on the child's ability (Hadfield, 2015).

In conclusion it is hoped the art space proposal will be well received and the project can go ahead. If successful, the practitioner would like to share their entrepreneurial experiences with settings hoping to achieve similar goals and to view existing facilities to gain new ideas.

Reference List

Refs and citations needed for two pictures on front page

Refs and citations needed for six pictures on products and services pages

Refs and citations needed for three pictures on elevator pitch page 5

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