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## We Are Here! Observations and Analysis of the Year 3 Class Visits

Tate Schools and Teachers Team with Eileen Carnell

# Reflections on the Year 3 Project

This essay is one of nine commissioned by A New Direction to reflect on the Tate Year 3 Project and provoke thinking about future projects. For the full set go to [www.anewdirection.org.uk/year-3-reflections](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/year-3-reflections)

### **Tate Schools and Teachers Team with Eileen Carnell**

The Schools and Teachers Team planned the students' visits with Effie Coe and Mónica Rivas Velásquez leading on the production of the resource. Alongside the team, Eileen Carnell, an independent researcher, collaborated in the observing and writing processes. These colleagues form part of a larger group involved in the planning of the visit, the bookings and training which are all framed by the team's practice led by Leanne Turvey and Alice Walton. Tate Schools and Teachers Team: Effie Coe, Linda Da Silva Coiradas, Viana Gaudino, Anna-Marie Gray, Sophie Langsford, George Lyddiatt, Emma McGarry, Amy McKelvie, Stef Martin, Sophie Popper, Mónica Rivas Velásquez, Leanne Turvey, Alice Walton, and Elizabeth Went.

# **We Are Here!**

## **Observations and Analysis of the Year 3 Class Visits**

**June**

# **2021**

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The term *Tate Year 3 Project* in the first instance and *Year 3* thereafter refers to the whole project including planning and production stages.

*Steve McQueen Year 3* refers to the artwork and exhibition.

For clarity, we have referred to the school year group of Year 3 as Y3.

# We Are Here! Observations and Analysis of the Year 3 Class Visits

*Before the Tate Year 3 Project, Tate had never engaged students and schools on this scale. During the exhibition, from 12th November 2019 to 16th March 2020, 600 students visited every weekday. For many schools and students this was their first experience of a cultural project and possibly their first engagement with the notion of an artist. Over 50% of the schools attending had not visited Tate before.<sup>1</sup>*

This text is about the impact of the resource on the students' experiences of the exhibition, what this produced and its ripples. The observer, Eileen Carnell, spent eight days with students, their teachers, and Tate staff, witnessing all stages of the visit and having conversations along the way.

1. Ascertained through cross referencing past booking data (55% had not visited Tate in the past 5 years).

2. Year 3 Group Assistants received bespoke training sessions (including the use of resources with young people and SEND schools) to support each group visiting the Steve McQueen Year 3 artwork. They were the most present members of staff directly witnessing all aspects of the young people's gallery visit and encounter with the artwork; including each's group's arrival and welcome, the journey to find their photograph, the use of the resource and safely guided returns to schools.

## Eileen Carnell

### What does a good project with children look and sound like?

Their voices fill the air and echo around the gallery. Building a gradual crescendo from a whisper to a mighty roar and back again, to a surprised silence. The students sing out: "I am here. You are here. We are here!"

This joyful and powerful assertion is in response to the invitation to wake up the whole gallery: a melodic dawn chorus. Our observations and the comments collected confirm this is a unique experience:

“

*It's great our portraits are here alongside kings, queens and old dudes.*

**Year 3 (Y3) student**

*We are very important as this is all about us.*

**Y3 student**

*We are great and loud and much noisier than other groups.*

**Y3 student**

*The kids are responding so well to the challenge. I'm just overcome.*

**Year 3 Group Assistant<sup>2</sup>**

*The adults join in and smile which is unusual. I think it's because being part of the artwork themselves the kids know they have a right to be here. There is no tutting, no disapproval. Everyone, not just the kids, are liberated and spontaneous.*

**Teacher**

*The gallery feels like a completely different place. It's alive. Normally you can hear a pin drop. Now it's buzzing. The children are being dared to occupy the place and fill it.*

**Member of the public**

These comments paint a picture of what the project sounded and looked like in the space of the gallery and portray the sense that everyone, students, teachers, staff and 'found audience' felt it was a positive experience. The gallery becomes 'a radical space of possibility' and resonates with the inspiring words of bell hooks: 'developing a sense of community to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence'.<sup>3</sup>

As well as the sounds celebrating the students' presence the vision of their inhabiting the space is spectacular. When the groups of students are finding their class photo they resemble a flock of birds - a human murmur: 'It's like seeing a flock of starlings fly together in an intelligent shape-shifting cloud, a single being moving and twisting in unpredictable formations'.<sup>4</sup>

On entering the gallery, the students often gasp at the size of the photographic work of art and then, encouraged by the host, move around to find their photo amid the larger collection. Many cannot contain their delight: "It's so exciting, I can see me and my friends, and my teachers and see how I have changed since the photo was taken." ■

3. b. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 8.

4. H. O'Donoghue, *Looking Back in Order to Look Forward- Examining Archival Practice in the MoMA* (Dublin, Ireland: IMMA, 2020)

5. *Colleagues included members of the Schools and Teachers Team, drawing on extensive experience of inclusive practice within learning in gallery settings including workshops, large scale projects and resources developed in collaboration with artists and partners. Teachers from A New Direction's SEND Network were consulted and training was led by artists Richard Phoenix and Aysen Aktu, who devised and delivered a session with the Year 3 hosts that drew on their co-curated Art and SEND-Supporting Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Teachers' Study Day that took place in May 2019.*

## Tate Schools and Teachers Team

### How does a project like this evolve?

We, in the Schools and Teachers team, were faced with unique challenges and opportunities during the exhibition's development and points of engagement.

The number of school groups and the amount of time students had available in the gallery led us to the decision that a student resource would be the best way of supporting students and teachers to engage with and draw out their experiences of encountering art and ideas in the gallery.

The nature of the students' visit was particular in that it was 'in company', not just with classmates but with other schools; 76,146 students took part, portrayed in 3,128 class photographs. This became a phenomenon that was widely commented upon in relation to the experience of the general public. The students created an atmosphere which was seen as synonymous with the artwork. They became the artwork, not just through their photos but through their presence. We understand this is not something that anyone, including Steve McQueen, expected. The students' presence became performative and fundamentally shaped how the artwork was 'seen'.

### The Tate Schools and Teachers Team's practice and planning process

Our practice at Tate brings an audience into conversation **with** artworks and usually alongside an artist as well as their teachers. It is a dialogic practice that welcomes participants into a process of discovery, building meaning collectively and with an emphasis placed on everybody's voices being valued.

We endeavour to challenge received notions of gallery etiquette, to confront assumptions about how to behave and encouraging multiple ways of being with art.

It is our belief that an individual should be welcomed to Tate, with all their lived experiences, what they know and don't know, what questions and ideas they hold and what culture they bring. This is the optimum starting point for looking at and being with

art. In this case it was the students themselves. This in turn was about equity and a broader challenge about dominant narratives, who gets to make meaning, be heard, and be valued.

One of the profound differences of the Year 3 experience was that the children in the gallery, taking up space, being noisy, enjoying their visit, were the same children **in** the artwork. This was particular for the young people themselves but also for the general visitor who was aware of witnessing the young people 'seeing' themselves on the gallery walls. We felt that this afforded the young people a certain confidence in being in the space; without them the artwork did not exist! And this drew attention to the value the team places on the students' presence in the gallery, however they choose to engage with the art they encounter.

Key to our thinking was the desire to focus on and foster empathy, supporting the notion of stepping into another's shoes to consider the students' experience, and how it related to their own. We avoided being drawn to difference in a negative/visual way, but rather talked about seeing differences in relation to commonalities. We lifted the reflection on difference from what can be seen to bring it into the realm of empathy.

In approaching the writing of all our resources and the use of language in them, we have high expectations of students and take particular care to ensure that resources are open, inviting, and clear. We put our trust in the belief that students are capable of grappling with difficult ideas.

Welcoming groups with additional needs was key and central to the visits. We called these occasions 'quiet days' from an organisational point of view. There were five schools in the morning, and five in the afternoon, to have more space and time, and a flexible schedule to make the most of the day. Preparation and training for these 'quiet days' was led by colleagues<sup>5</sup>. Rather than being the exception, these days were modelled on what we would want every Tate visit to be. ■

## Eileen Carnell

### The resource supporting the students' visits

It cannot be underestimated what this meticulous welcome offered students. They were seen, recognised and hosted. From the welcoming statements in the resource, it can be seen that students' experiences are central. The team drew on their learning from previous student experiences in the gallery to construct the new resource and used their knowledge to make a safe space for risk, expression, and exploration.

The activities in the resource supported by the encouragement of the host, inspired active participation, social engagement, fun and collaborative learning – all hallmarks of the team's particular approach: 'co-constructivist and dialogic models of learning, where individual's experience and prior knowledge is recognized as contributing to the shared meaning-making of the whole group'.<sup>6</sup>

The team has a long-standing practice of producing resources. These are often conceived and produced as printed media carrying prompts and invitations for ways of being in the gallery, sharing with peers and

encountering the artworks. While they often look like booklets, they are not for reading, instead, they are a platform to launch action. For Year 3, the booklet was extensive (12 pages) and held the team's welcome and strategies. The tone was crucial. It spoke directly to the individual student, inviting them to come together with peers, and raise their voice, and take up space. And from one prompt to the next the students gained ownership of the gallery.

The resource was a great success. Students expressed their delight in receiving a copy. One said: "We got this book 'cos we're really special. I can see my face in it." The resource was looked after carefully by the students. Not a single one was left behind. A teacher commented: "The resource is brilliant and I'll do more back at school with it as I have done with another class."

The resource drew heavily on '[studio thinking](#)', embedding and channeling dispositions commonly used by artists such as curiosity, testing, and experimenting, to foster a confident and playful exploration of the artwork and surrounding ideas. In developing the Year 3 resource, the team worked

slightly differently to their usual approach. As Steve McQueen was involved in all aspects of the project, the team centred on his ideas around which the team, many of whom are practitioners, drew on their practice, rather than involving others. ■

*" You have arrived at Tate Britain. You are in a very special artwork. You are also the audience. Congratulations! It is rare to visit an art gallery and see your own face..."*

Steve McQueen Year 3 exhibition resource

## Tate Schools and Teachers Team

### The learning

A key motivation for the Schools and Teachers team was our belief that welcoming the Year 3 students - we welcomed 33,450 out the 76,146 students featured in the artwork – to Tate Britain might have a transformative impact. It did.

All the experiences described here fundamentally shifted Tate. The students' visits were loud, lively, physical and did not follow set ways of being in the gallery. For that moment of their encounter, for each student it was their experience, it was art, it was Tate. We feel a responsibility to the process of students transforming Tate, through the challenge of their

presence, unequivocal given their role in 'making' this work, in ensuring that Tate remains as open, flexible, agile, and responsive as possible and willing to learn. Tate must remain changed.

Tate was made different by the students' presence. As a new and more inclusive institution, Tate needs to remember and honour this. Tate needs to be 'super adaptable' - more than just being welcoming but willing to re-morph to be better and give gallery space to hundreds of students. The belief, underlying this, is if students are listened to, heard, and learned from - not only by us as a team but by the whole institution - Tate will be better for all visitors and staff. ■

6. L. Turvey, & A. Walton, 'Audience, Artist, exploring the practice of learning with art', In *Site of Conversation: On learning with Art, Audiences and Artists* (London: Tate Publications, 2017), 11.

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*A New Direction's Year 3 team:  
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and Jim Beck.*

**A New Direction** is an award-winning non-profit organisation working to enhance the capacity and agency of children and young people in London to own their creativity, shape culture, and achieve their creative potential.

We do this by working with a diverse range of partners, making connections, sharing practice, influencing change, improving the ecology that surrounds children and young people, and by providing real and transformative opportunities - from childhood, through school years and into employment.

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*Image: Steve McQueen Year 3 ©Tate*