



Last year we received \$30,000 funding towards our Extraordinarily Creative (EC) Drama Classes, \$15,000 each from Cognition Education and IHC. These funders are not supporting the programme in 2023.

Autistic or neurodivergent children and teens (kids) experience the world differently to their neurotypical counterparts. These differences can impact relationships, learning, regulating emotion, speech and a range of other outcomes. But being different does not mean you cannot succeed. Like anyone, neurodivergent kids can learn the skills they need to thrive in modern society. At Tim Bray Theatre Company, our Youth Theatre *Extraordinarily Creative* (EC) classes do just that, we use drama as a tool to help kids from all backgrounds and abilities to thrive.

Since February 2021, EC classes have helped autistic and neurodivergent kids (aged 5-16yrs) our Extraordinary Creatives. The impact was immediate, improved outcomes for our students. The methods are simple, use drama, kindness, patience, skill and consistency to help kids learn how to build relationships, process emotion, engage in school, communicate and other crucial life skills - skills which most of us take for granted.

"I wish everyday was a drama class day" "I really love drama class" - Those are the words she says pretty much every day. Drama classes are always her great motivation and she has changed a lot since she started going to Tim Bray. Even though she can't communicate like other kids her age, she is always confident and happy in her class. I, as a parent, really appreciate that she found a place she feels accepted and ok to be herself. H.P. - mother of 9-year-old daughter with ADHD and ASD



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The EC programme will always need funding support. Student to tutor ratios are 4 times higher and class sizes are half the size of our neurotypical classes. To ensure EC is affordable, class fees are the same as our other programmes. We are investing heavily in tutor training and development. This year we have implemented eight paid internships to ensure our team can develop the knowledge and skills.

These weekly drama classes focus on improving outcomes for neurodiverse children. Our tutors undertake specialised training from experts in drama and neurodiversities to help them understand the wide range of needs within the classroom. Classes run during the school term over 10-weeks and are split into age groups of 5-7yrs, 8-10yrs, 11-13yrs and 14-16yrs. Our EC classes are providing a unique and important service for neurodiverse children. As far as we are aware, there are no other classes of this kind operating in Auckland. In fact, contact from parents around the country suggests that they are probably unique in Aotearoa.

Funding has helped support EC, including Meadowood Community Centre (North Shore) and establishing classes at a second venue, Te Oro Music and Arts Centre in Glen Innes. Reflecting on the events of the last 6 months, we are delighted with the current success of our EC classes, with over 40 students currently enrolled, and demand from South Auckland whānau supporting a third venue at the Nathan Homestead in Manurewa. The messaging about EC is growing, as are word of mouth referrals. While classes are not yet at capacity, we see them growing as anxiety regarding the pandemic lessens. We are fielding enquiries about EC and the benefits we offer.

We continue to advertise our EC classes across a range of areas and mediums. This example shows a typical advert which might run in print and/or social media channels.

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TIM BRAY YOUTH THEATRE

For autistic and neuro-diverse youth
to find their own voice and place

**EXTRAORDINARILY
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Holiday Programme &
Weekly Drama Classes
for neurodiverse
children & teens

Te Oro Music & Arts Centre
from January 2022

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EXPLORING



Our younger students have become accustomed to the idea of ‘agreeing to collaborate’ and checking their self-regulation before they begin class.

My daughter is loving her Extraordinarily Creative drama sessions! They are carefully run, by caring staff, who provide a safe space where she can be herself and have fun with her peers. And as a parent, I can relax knowing that she is in good hands and is being cared for by people who understand her, in an environment that is tolerant and welcoming.

-- Nicole B., EC parent of 12-year-old, March 2022 (Te Oro)



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The success of the weekly classes drove demand for EC school holiday workshops at both venues. These are week-long school holiday programmes which are often a gentle introduction to the classes for new students while allowing the ongoing social interaction for those that have found their 'safe place' in the term time classes (some EC students keenly felt the gap left by the ending of term time classes for the school holidays). While great for existing students, the school holiday workshops have also been helpful for parents exploring the option of drama classes for their child, particularly important for a neurodiverse child. Parents continue to speak to the impact of these classes, particularly for students who have been struggling with social isolation and anxiety about the pandemic.

EC Classes involve a range of structured activities, many of them repetitive, the aim to clearly show students where to go and what to do. As part of the checking-in process we use a Legoman activity which enables students to show how they are feeling generally and about participating in the class. It provides students with a voice, but also gives tutors an insight into each individual and how they might be feeling.

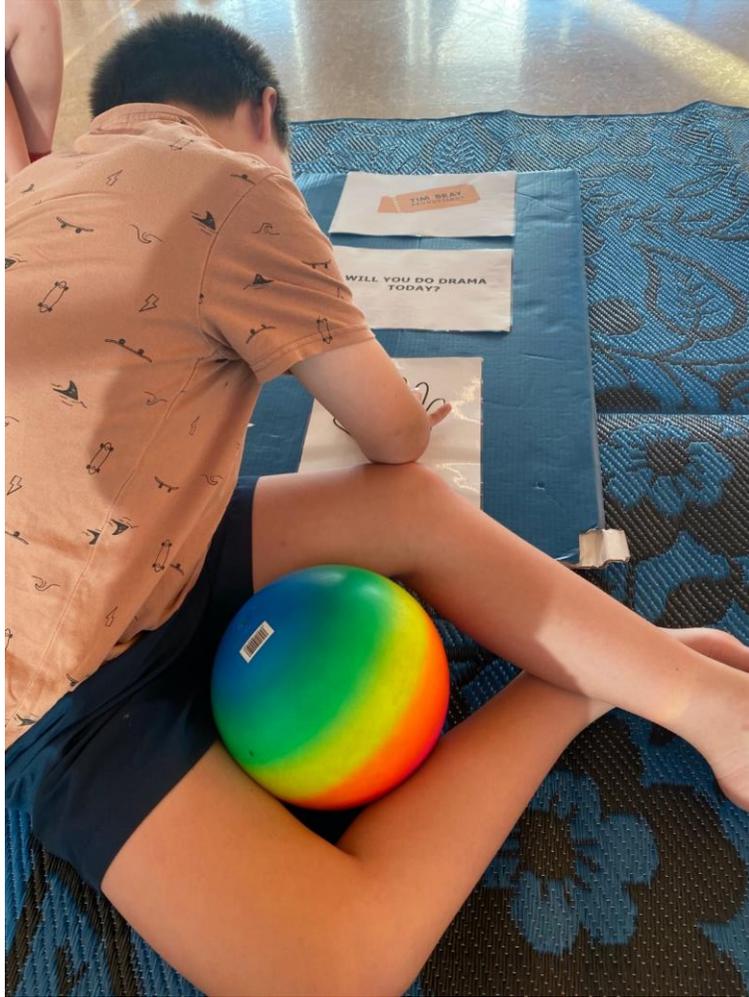
Sometimes students are not able to contribute to the class because of how they are feeling. These feelings are often nothing to do with the class itself but would impact on the student's ability to participate if not fully understood. The tutors may discuss these issues or perhaps provide simple exercises designed to help students begin to self-regulate. Student well-being is paramount, and where every class begins. Tutors work with students, helping them to understand and verbalise their feelings.

"The teachers are amazing, supportive, genuine and caring, the other kids are great and it is a neat environment to chat to the other parents without any judgement and feel a sense of belonging. We absolutely recommend the classes and would love to thank everyone involved for the way they welcomed and encouraged my son."

-- Caprice S. EC parent, March 2021 (Meadowood)



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All of our students begin each class by voluntarily identifying and talking about feelings. We use a Lego board because many neurodivergent children find looking at human faces confronting.



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The tutor setting up the Legoman activity and 3 students working through the process.



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The cornerstone of our EC classes remains the drama. Through drama our students are able to make sense of the world and how they see it. Drama is the tool we use to guide these students to unlock their own self-belief and wellbeing. The relationship with the tutors is a key factor in this success. Many students do not like change, so new tutors or routines are introduced slowly. Feedback from parents shows the level of commitment and importance of our tutors and the relationships they build with our students.

"I love these inclusive drama classes as I believe they are helping my boy Patrick (7) continue to learn how his body moves and to express himself safely and with growing confidence. All our kids need a safe and accessible and acceptable place to learn, and your classes are definitely that! He evens tells his teacher at school all about drama class...and he knows everyone's name! "

-- Natasha J., EC parent, March 2022 (Meadowood)



Students are able to move around when they need to regulate and to be their authentic self in classes. There is radical acceptance and unconditional like in our classes.



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We explore new games that encourage team work and support of each other – thus building on relationships and focusing on the process of the task rather than the product.



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Feedback from parents of EC students illustrates the kind of impact our classes are having. But they only tell some of the story. Our tutors see changes on a weekly basis, sometimes small, sometimes profound. It is this kind of impact which helps drive the success of the programme.

My son has loved coming to drama and although it's difficult to get much information from him, it's clearly a highlight of the week for him. I love that we can leave him there and not be involved as parents as it really promotes his independence, and also shows how well structured, focused and enjoyable the sessions must be. It was also lovely getting some detailed feedback about how Joshua was going after a few sessions in. Thanks so much for the wonderful opportunity for my son to be involved in this drama and all your expertise. And my son says "I love drama because I love it, because I play stuff. That's it."

-- Kirsten M., EC parent of 8-year-old, March 2022 (Te Oro)



Te Oro Music and Arts Centre in Glen Innes provides a great space for our students and tutors to explore. While social distancing was required, we were able to launch our classes with plenty of space to ensure students, tutors were safe, and that parents were comfortable with the set up. The pandemic has posed many different challenges for all of us. And the success of the EC programme is down to the wonder work of our tutor team who work so hard to ensure their students get the best possible outcome.



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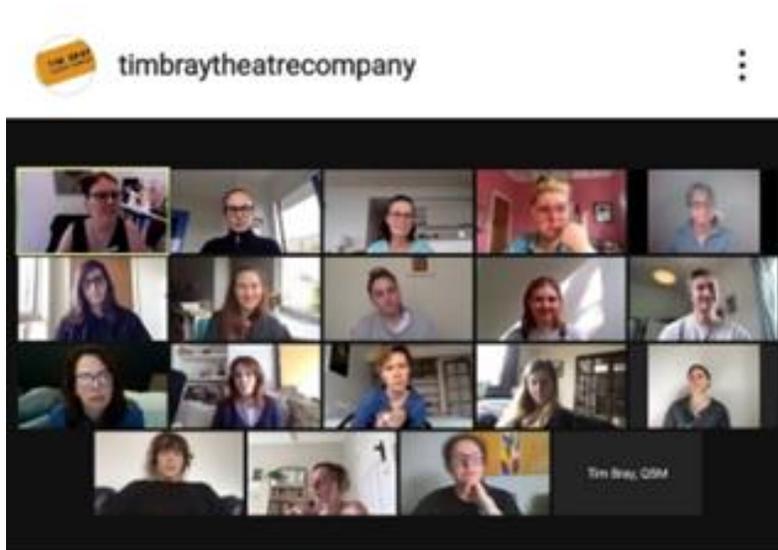
Students are able to create their own fictions through various activities such as Story Cubes. Imagination is encouraged and self-belief is created when students realise there is no wrong way to tell the story. The students also become empowered to verbalise their ideas despite different speaking and communication challenges.



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I really appreciate that this programme was set up to begin with! Not many would have the courage to do so. My son really enjoys drama! I just love how I can trust the teachers to be in tune with his feelings and just fly with it in a relaxed manner, knowing how to encourage interaction in his way of expression without being surprised, shocked or offended. I have heard great things about Tim Bray, and I am thankful to be part of it as well as be part of it at an expense that I can afford because as you know special needs classes often are expensive.

-- Gjin H., EC parent of 7-year-old, March 2022 (Te Oro)



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timbraytheatrecompany Whaowhia te kete mātauranga! Thanks to all the Tim Bray Youth Theatre tutors who took part in the 2nd week of online professional development. It was a workshop with Jeanita Cush-Hunter from ACE - Autism Consultancy and Education who leads our Extraordinarily Creative drama classes. All the wisdom and resources from this workshop really inspired and empowered us to continually support autistic and neurodiverse children with better skills and understanding. Ka mau te wehi!

Our EC classes are designed to specifically cater for the needs of autistic and neurodiverse students, but these students can and do join our neurotypical classes. Our head tutor, Jeanita Cush-Hunter provides a consulting and education service for those with autism and neurodiversities. Jeanita was a key part of the team that created the EC programme and continues to provide training and advice as we continue to grow and develop. All our tutors work through training modules and workshops so that they understand our students and how they see the world. Training has used a mix of online and more recently, in person sessions to ensure our tutors are well prepped to manage the students in their care. Ultimately, we work together to understand the students with autism and neurodiversities.



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EXPRESSING



Our students have begun to express their interest in social situations by creating scenarios with doll families and furniture.



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Our tutors provide a mix of formal and informal reporting for parents. After most classes they engage and talk with parents, particularly if something has come up during the class. But sometimes, parents may not know what students are thinking, or the details of their daily lives.

These classes for my son have been amazing. He enjoys them so much!
-- Gemma H., parent of EC student, May 2022 (Meadowood)

Tim Bray Theatre Company
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We would like to acknowledge IHC Foundation, Cognition Education Trust, Te Oro and Maungakiekie-Tāmaki Local Board for their support with our Kaupapa and continued development of our Extraordinarily Creative (EC) programmes - ...see more

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"My daughter is loving her Extraordinarily Creative drama sessions! They are carefully run, by caring staff." — Nicole B., March 2022



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We include some examples of our Term 1 review and reflection reports, including one example from our EC school holiday programme. *Note, we have removed the student names to protect their privacy.* As you can see, the tutors take the time to reflect on a number of outcomes for each student, focusing particularly on positive and successful outcomes. This is critical for many neurodiverse students, who may have found that success in a class setting does not come easy. Often behaviour that stems from how students see the world might be construed as naughtiness, and academic performance and personal success can be difficult to attain. Our EC philosophy is to look for ways to highlight and celebrate student success. We use reporting, speak with parents, students and sometimes other people involved in their lives (such as teachers, social workers).

Thank you, this is awesome! So good to know her progress and it's so motivating. She is looking forward to the classes next term and thank you for providing the place where she can feel accepted and shine:)

-- H.P. EC parent, April 2021 (Meadowood)

REFLECTION AND REVIEW TIME ☺

CLASS: 5-7 Years



Student: [REDACTED]	Term: 1, 2022
Tutors: Jeanita Cush-Hunter and Clementine Mills	

Participation	Communication	Imagination
[REDACTED] is an eager participant in Drama class. He has shown great interest in participating in all activities.	[REDACTED] speaks clearly and is a keen storyteller. He communicates clearly and is able to expand on ideas. [REDACTED] is eager to communicate with all members of the class.	[REDACTED] has a strong and highly creative imagination. He loves acting out stories physically with his body and he enjoys role play and focused play as well.
Cooperation	Attitude	Tutor Comment
[REDACTED] cooperates with his classmates and with his tutors. He has shown a willingness to interact with the class in a variety of exercises.	[REDACTED] seems to be enjoying Drama. He is an energetic and very involved member of the class. [REDACTED] is respectful and polite with his tutors.	[REDACTED] is a delight to have in class. He brings positivity and energy to his classes. [REDACTED] has a lot of dramatic potential.

REFLECTION AND REVIEW TIME ☺

CLASS: 14-16 Years

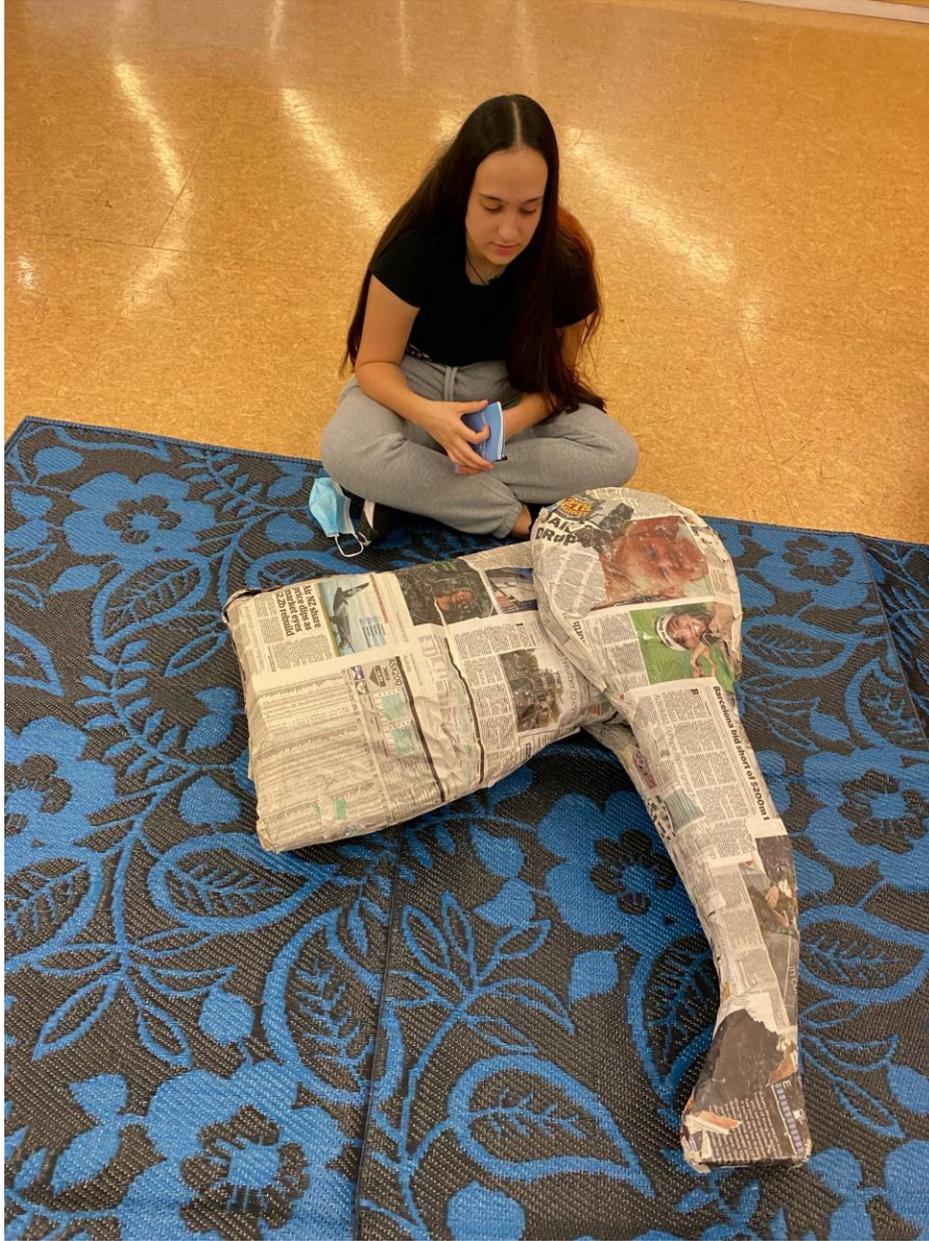


Student: [REDACTED]	Term: 1, 2022
Tutors: Jeanita Cush-Hunter	

Participation	Communication	Imagination
[REDACTED] has made an enormous contribution to our Drama class this term. She has generously permitted the class to use her short story that has been adapted into a play for a class performance.	[REDACTED] has continued to grow in confidence in Drama classes. It has been wonderful to see her sharing her ideas and thoughts so easily with her class. It is also so great to get to enjoy [REDACTED]'s humour.	[REDACTED] has shared her amazing imagination with her class this term. We have all been impressed by her creation of original characters in her short story.
Cooperation	Attitude	Tutor Comment
[REDACTED] has been very cooperative in class this term. She has engaged willingly in class activities and she has been very helpful in bringing our class performance to the stage. [REDACTED] is showing some potential as a budding director.	[REDACTED] has a great attitude toward Drama. She is engaged and enthusiastic in our class this term. We have been so impressed with [REDACTED]'s courage in sharing her original work with the class.	It is a pleasure to have [REDACTED] in our classroom. She brings a unique energy personality to our classes that is so much appreciated. It is a privilege to have [REDACTED] in our class.



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Our students have felt confident and relaxed about sharing their personal talents with us. Our classrooms are flexible enough to allow all expressions of talent. This is an example of character creation for a class play.



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Tim Bray Theatre Company ▶ Bayswater & Belmont Community, NZ

11 April · 🌐



Assistant Drama tutor Clementine Mills. Clem joined our programme in Term 1 this year and couldn't be happier 😊.

"I love working with these wonderful young people and creating a safe space for them to explore their creativity and imagination, relinquishing the need for them to be anything but themselves" Come and meet our tutors at the Extraordinarily Creative Holiday Programme in April. Spaces are still available for all age groups at Meadowood Community House on the North S... See more



EXTRAORDINARILY CREATIVE

Clementine Mills

Extraordinarily Creative Assistant Drama Tutor

" I love working with these wonderful young people and creating a safe space for them to explore their creativity and imagination, relinquishing the need for them to be anything but themselves"

E: youth.theatre@timbray.org.nz

Tim Bray Theatre Company is 🥳 feeling fantastic.

11 April · 🌐

Extraordinarily Creative drama classes for autistic and neurodivergent children and teenagers are led by Assistant Drama tutor Clementine Mills. Clem joined our ... See more



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Our students often have difficulty recognising, identifying, and talking about emotions and feelings. We encourage students to develop knowledge of these important aspects through puzzles and stories. Here we have two of our young students thinking about what different feelings might look like on people's faces.



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Showing any sort of communication can be very challenging for our students. Here we have two very shy and timid students exploring posing for a photo boldly. The added bonus is the incorporation of the expressive wave.



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We aim to allow our students to access all opportunities. Dyspraxia and other movement challenges are frequently experienced by autistic people. Here we are creating our own yoga sequences by using cards.



We develop and allow the joy of uninhibited play. Often our students are corrected by many people through their day. When they come to us, we allow them to express themselves freely.



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We use finger puppets for role plays and to allow our students to experiment with emotional expression. We develop communication and relevant connections by demonstrating explorative play. Playing with other children is often difficult for autistic children – here two of our students are enjoying human connection through play.



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One of our students wrote a short story that one of our tutors turned into a play. Here we have the class beginning to block out the play. Each student is able to create voice, movements and attitude for their character.



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Improvisation is a fun way to gain confidence in social interactions. In this game, students choose a monster and then show us how that monster would move. There is often wonderful, expressive movement shown in these interpretations.



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ENGAGING



Students have been able to develop collaboration and concentration skills. Here students (some of whom have ADHD, Autism, and Down Syndrome) demonstrate their ability to do 'safe sitting' and to remain focused for the activity.



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Students have begun to engage with each other collaboratively without prompting.

Students listen to each other and regulate emotions while engaging in play – all ways of communicating are accepted.



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Relationships are vital to our work. Our students need genuine connections with people. We do not impress a traditional hierarchy on our classes and our tutors demonstrate acceptance and collaboration.

Agreeing to pretend is a big risk that should be respected.

Our tutors do not ask our students to do anything that they themselves wouldn't want to do.



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Working collaboratively as a group and developing patience through role-play and character guessing games has been a developing skill of our classes.



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Our students develop skills in concentrating, focusing, and persisting. Here we see some of our younger students practicing their play. The commitment to playing a character is a major challenge (and risk) for our students. Our students learn and are comforted by the fact that we are impressed with all interpretation



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An entire class role playing in the same game together.

Parents of the children were stunned.

PARENT: What sorcery is this?



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Sometimes the way to create opportunities to engage in other group tasks is simply to take some time to focus on an old-fashioned game like snakes and ladders. This allows our students to interact in a controlled and predictable manner – neurodivergent children often greatly dislike change. It is also a great opportunity to show off developing counting skills.



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Sometimes engagement is accessed through a special interest or something familiar. Play with our small train set usually develops into stories and role plays about what happens with the engine and the trucks. 'Look out, the train is off the tracks!' is a favourite.



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Sequencing and ordering events is an important part of telling stories. Many autistic children struggle with sequencing. Here we have students sequencing the story of the Three Billy Goats Gruff in order to narrate the story.



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Tutor and students following the rules of a drama game

Autistic and neurodiverse people see the world in a way that is different to neurotypical people. While most adults have found a way to manage the challenges of the modern world, for children it can be more difficult. This is compounded by isolation and disruption over the last two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our EC classes provide our students with a grounded, safe space to understand themselves and the world around them. We are excited to see how the classes continue to evolve, for ourselves and our students.

My son really enjoys drama classes, and it is helping him to build confidence in his ability to socialise with others. He is learning to take turns, listen and work as a team, which are traits he finds very difficult with his severe ADHD and strong autistic traits.

-- J.R., parent of EC student, April 2022 (Te Oro)

None of this work would be possible without the support and funding. We hope to attract funders who see the vision and impact of these classes. Particularly as demand calls for classes in South Auckland. Unfortunately, the EC programme may be suspended until we can obtain funding support. Our unique programme has changed the lives of our Extraordinarily Creatives, we hope this does not have to end.



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