

## My work experience with the BEAM Lab. Amy Matthews, BSc Psychology student.

From October 2015 to May 2016, I worked as an assistant with the 'Body Eyes and Movement' lab. This included assisting with a series of science and art masterclasses at the Whitworth Art Gallery. The masterclasses aimed to engage primary school children about science and art exploring topics such as the uncanny valley (the effect of realistic human-like or unrealistic objects on feelings), art and robotics.



During this week, I worked alongside Drs Ellen Poliakoff and Emma Gowen along with Whitworth Primary Coordinator Steven Roper, local Manchester based artist Antony Hall and another Psychology student. I really enjoyed working with everyone, in a team. The classes began with students being asked to guess the professions of Ellen/Emma and Tony, to challenge any pre-existing conceptions they had, once it was revealed Tony was the artist and Ellen or Emma the scientist, the students then completed a short drawing activity to show what they believed an artist and scientist looked like. Ellen or Emma then gave a short presentation on the BEAM lab, the uncanny valley and why they wanted to be scientists, which were very inspirational for the students. Students then created their own uncanny graphs in groups.

I found conversation with the children about the Uncanny Valley extremely interesting, as students would tell me their thoughts on particular images (if they thought they were realistic/creepy) explaining why they had put the image in certain section of the graph. Antony later showed children a robot, made with an iPad, voiced by the student's teacher, this generated a very excited response.



Antony mentioned how the Uncanny Valley is important for understanding how robots could be made, as they may be used in the classroom in the future.

Students were then taken to the Portrait Gallery where they met curator Bryony Bond, who showed them around the gallery, talking about portraits students found interesting, they were then able to explore the gallery themselves, drawing the portraits they liked. After lunch students engaged in lots of art based activities – they drew faces on paper with their eyes closed, made faces on masks worn by partners, created 3D faces out of playdough, 2D faces on a projector and paper faces to stick on an uncanny valley graph, labelling their creations as more or less creepy/realistic. The students really enjoyed these activities, making lots of mess in the process! This was followed by a group discussion about their graph at the end of the day, students then completed the draw a scientist/artist to see if original ideas had changed. In total over 150 children attended.

After the masterclasses, I created an exhibition at the University with another student as a response to the positive feedback we received from the schools during the week. We explained what we did during the masterclasses, including a Happy Valley graph for people to place realistic/abstract faces on themselves. There was also a computer rating exercise for people to indicate if they thought drawings were scientist/artists to address their perceptions of the roles, and a graph for visitors to indicate if they viewed themselves as an artist or scientist, generating some interesting interpretations. It was great a success and was attended by numerous staff and students. Overall I really enjoyed my time working with the BEAM lab, it was such an enjoyable and invaluable experience, one which I will never forget.