

Light Up School Learning Project

Executive Summary



“It’s the best training I have had in the last fifteen years”.

(Comment from a teacher who has been involved throughout the two-year project; Nov 2022)

Introduction

Light Up School Learning (LUSL) was a two-year Continuing Professional Development Learning project, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Teacher Development Fund, which aimed to develop arts-based teaching in schools.



The project, which ran from September 2021 – July 2023, was led by Travelling Light, involved artists working alongside teachers from five primary schools across Bristol¹. The central focus of the project was to explore three key enquiry questions:

- *How effective is this model of arts-based delivery in developing teachers’ practice?*
- *How can arts-based learning improve pupils’ oracy, emotional literacy and wellbeing?*
- *How has the project led to a cultural shift within the whole school and its approach to the arts and arts-based teaching?*

This Executive Summary provides a brief overview of the project, the findings and offers recommendations for the future. It is followed by a more detailed report and appendices which have been the result of extensive and rigorous evaluation, both formative and summative across the two years of the project.

Evaluation data has been qualitative and quantitative involving artists, teachers, pupils and members of the School Leadership Teams, including Headteachers and included semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observations and reflection sessions.

Summary of activities over two years:

- 5 Bristol schools started the project - 4 schools remained throughout the 2 years. 1 school left in November 2022.
- 35 teachers took part in the project - with a mixture of experienced and early career teachers.
- 35 classes of children were involved in the project - children from across the age groups were involved, ranging from Year 1 through to Year 6.
- We delivered 5 Arts Days for the whole school in Autumn 2021 - involving all teachers.
- Over 1700 children participated in at least one element of the project. This includes children who participated in Arts Days, with each school having an Arts Day at the early stages of the project. Over 900 children have been involved in the classroom-based element of the project with artists and teachers for at least a term.
- 8 artists were involved in the delivery with teachers.
- Artists delivered 408 sessions in school, this included 56 observations (artists observing teachers in class) 25 planning sessions, and 327 sessions of artists and teachers working together in the classroom. Artists also facilitated 12 staff meetings – 3 in each school in year 2.

¹ One of these schools dropped out of the project in November 2022, following the appointment of a new Headteacher and changing school priorities.

1. The models of delivery and their effectiveness in developing teachers' practice in using arts-based methods

The project commenced with a whole school Arts Day in each school, where all artists on the project worked across the schools. This was followed by an extensive programme where two teachers from each school worked with one or two artists across 18 weeks of classroom delivery, a combination of sessions being artist-led, then teachers and artists co-teaching and finally teachers leading the sessions with the artists supporting.

In Year 2, there were 3 types of delivery models with each model commencing with a planning lesson, and an artist observation, and followed by different lengths of classroom delivery:

- a 'short' model over 3 lessons
- a 'mid-length' model over 9 lessons
- and an 'extended' model, similar to Year 1, over 18 lessons.

Each model was carefully negotiated following extensive discussion with the project leader, Lizzy Stephens, and members of the Senior Leadership Team from each school. In one school, the focus was on revising the school's PSHE scheme of work but in all other schools the focus was more general, involving adapting existing schemes of work from across the curriculum to make them more creative by integrating arts-based methods.

Findings on the effectiveness of each model

a) The short model involving teachers and artist working together for one term

- The short model offered greater opportunity for more staff to experience working with a range of artists with different specialisms.
- When focussing on one area of the curriculum, such as PSHE, it was an effective model to revise schemes of work, as well as having whole school impact.
- Teachers, particularly those who were more apprehensive about taking time away from the planned curriculum, were more willing to participate due to the short length of the programme.
- More teachers in the school developed a repertoire of creative practice, however this was limited due to the restricted number of sessions.
- The 'short' model, although appreciated by teachers, was seen as being too short. Teachers would have preferred it to be extended to five or six lessons over a term so they could gain greater confidence and become more independent in adopting a drama-based pedagogy.
- The short model was less effective in impacting pupils' oracy and confidence than other models, although children enjoyed lessons being more creative.



b) Mid-length model, five teachers working with one artist for three terms

- Creative pedagogy became more embedded in the practice of teachers. There was strong evidence that all teachers were independently incorporating creative approaches in their classrooms across a range of subjects.
- A positive relationship was developed between the teachers and the artist based on mutual trust and partnership.
- As the mid-length model involved five teachers, senior leaders felt there was less risk of skills being lost if a teacher was to leave the school.
- Senior leaders and teachers appreciated being able to work with one artist who became recognised more widely across the school.

- The artist was able to experience the benefits of an 'artist in residence' approach, able to feel part of the school and share expertise by providing support to other teachers at lunchtime. As a consequence, teachers who were part of the project in the first three terms were able to seek support and continue to embed creative approaches into future lessons.
- This model was highly successful in building teacher confidence and developing a wider range of creative approaches to lessons. However, its success was more dependent on the teachers and the artist forming a positive relationship.



c) Extended model, two teachers working with four different artists across a year

- Two teachers had a sustained and prolonged opportunity for professional development throughout the year.
- Teachers experienced a range of artists with different expertise and skills.
- There was a more sustained impact on teacher practice. By the end of the year teachers were consistently using creative approaches independently in a range of subjects. One teacher reflected that using creative approaches had become intuitive – having a range of strategies to enhance pupil's learning when needed.
- Creative approaches were written into a wider range of schemes of work across many curriculum areas. This was in part due to six planning sessions (one a term) being incorporated into the provision.
- Relationships between the artist and teachers were strong, particularly when artists worked with the teachers for two terms.
- Pupils in both classes had a prolonged experience of engaging with creative practice and as a consequence spoke more regularly of sustained self-confidence, improved oracy and enhanced well-being.
- Senior leaders spoke of considerable impact on the two teachers' practice, particularly an Early Careers Teacher (ECT) who had developed confidence, presence, and more effective use of his voice as a result of the on-going support and modelling of specific skills provided by artists.
- With only two teachers involved in the project, the whole school impact was more restricted. Staff meetings were important to raise the profile of the LUSL project across the school. If a member of staff left the school, the high level of CPDL would be lost to that school, although a teacher would take the skills with them to another school.

d) Overall findings

- All models of delivery were successful and effective in changing teachers' practice to be more creative in using drama-based strategies in their teaching. However, when there has been extended support from artists there is deeper and more prolonged impact.
- Extended and long-lasting impact develops over time; therefore, it is recommended that artists work alongside teachers for two terms or longer.
- In Year 2, schools developed their own bespoke models of delivery which enabled teachers to integrate drama-based activities across the curriculum and adapt existing schemes of work to employ more creative practice.



- Over time artists became skilled in working alongside teachers and learnt a new approach to working in schools, particularly if they worked with the same teacher for two terms or more.
- Teachers who were initially concerned that pupils' behaviour would be adversely affected by using more active approaches in the classroom, reported due to increased motivation and understanding, the behaviour in their classes improved as the pupils became used to the change in teaching style. This was particularly the case in mid-length and extended projects.



2. The success of Year 2 of the project

Although Year 1 of the LUSL project was successful in part, Year 2 of the project was far more successful than Year 1. This was due to:

- The project being more bespoke and tailored to each school's needs.
- The introduction of designated planning time between artists and teachers which added greater relevance for teachers as they built the project around existing schemes of work.
- Enhanced communication between teachers and artists which created a more positive relationship based on mutual respect and understanding.
- Greater ownership by teachers in the LUSL project led to increased motivation and teacher engagement.
- Artists developed a more flexible and nuanced approach. There was a greater understanding of classroom management and artists tailored the delivery of lessons to be more appropriate within a school context.

Additionally, the LUSL project proved to be a very effective CPDL programme to support ECTs and encourage experienced teachers to develop a more creative approach to teaching.

3. How can arts-based learning improve pupils' oracy, emotional literacy, and wellbeing?

Teachers and pupils reported a positive impact of being part of the LUSL project. When teachers saw the impact on their pupils, they became more motivated to use drama-based strategies across the curriculum. Teachers and pupils reported the following:

- The use of drama-based activities was found to improve pupils' learning. Teachers, artists and pupils reported improved confidence, oracy and wellbeing, as well as enhanced recall of knowledge and concepts.
- The extended and mid-length models led to more lasting change and greater impact on pupils.
- Pupils worked better in groups and the climate in the classroom became more positive. Pupils spoke particularly of improved skills in team work as well as increased motivation in their learning when arts-based approaches were used.
- Where teachers reported arts-based approaches were used, pupils' retention of learning and understanding was significantly enhanced. This was particularly the case with children living with trauma.



- Teachers reported improved writing outcomes following LUSL lessons.
- The impact on pupils' self-confidence can have a longitudinal benefit, even when pupils have not been part of the LUSL project beyond the first year. Pupils from Year 1 reported retaining their self-confidence, improved oracy and enhanced group skills. They appreciated being part of the LUSL project as it helped them build their confidence and social skills as a result of the impact of lockdowns and feelings of isolation as a result of the Covid pandemic.
- Pupils preferred working with artists for more than one term, so the artist knew them better and the pupils felt they had greater trust in the artist.



4. How has the project led to a cultural shift within the whole school and its approach to the arts and arts-based teaching?

“It helps you learn. It makes you curious and eager to learn. It helps me remember.” (Comment from a Year 4 pupil: July 2023)

In Year 2 the LUSL project was extended to include three staff meetings in each school. This involved a greater number of staff being introduced to more creative pedagogy across the school. To support the legacy of the project and ensure a cultural shift within the whole school is sustained, Travelling Light has produced a wide range of resources which will be available to schools in the 2023 Autumn Term.



During reflection meetings, senior leaders were keen to support the legacy of the project and develop the relationship with Travelling Light further. Future developments may include appointing a ‘LUSL champion’ in the school, additional planning support from artists for teachers when revising schemes of work and extending creative approaches in staff meetings.

The following findings evolved:

- Whole school activities, such as staff meetings, can be an effective way of team building within a staff community and increasing the use of creative pedagogy in schools. As a ‘small act’ of teacher development they can have considerable impact across the school.
- Evidence from two teachers, who were part of the LUSL project in Year 1 but were not supported by artists in Year 2, confirmed they have sustained and extended the use of art-based strategies in their classroom.
- Early signs, suggest there will be a long-term legacy to the project and the increase in the use of drama-based strategies across the school will be sustained. Teachers who worked alongside artists on the short, mid-length and extended models had continued to use drama-based strategies independently and were planning to write drama-based strategies into existing schemes of work.
- Although the LUSL project has only lasted for two years, there is good evidence so far that there has been a cultural shift in schools with a greater use of creative pedagogy across the school.

Additional findings on changing teacher's pedagogy:

- Teachers who were more experienced generally needed more time working with an artist to initiate confidence and change in their pedagogy. However, many reported feeling more motivated and re-energised in their teaching from the LUSL project.
- Senior leaders spoke of a positive impact on inexperienced/or trainee teachers. Early Careers Teachers benefitted from working with artists to develop generic teaching skills. They also felt in-class professional development was invaluable training for them, particularly as their Initial Teacher Training provision included little opportunity to develop creative approaches to teaching.



“Using creative activities brings learning to life.”

(Teacher comment: March 2023).

The following recommendations are offered for future development and to provide a legacy of the LUSL project:

- To build a legacy for the project, when Travelling Light teacher resources are available, consideration should be given to offering an additional staff meeting to accompany the resources. This will provide opportunity for existing staff to be reminded of the activities, and new staff to be familiarised with the resources.
- The findings should be shared, not only with those who participated on the project, but also through the network of trusts across Bristol.
- The resource bank offer could be extended to more schools across Bristol and beyond.
- Further consideration should be given into working with schools with a high level of cultural diversity. A further action research project could be established to provide greater understanding of how Drama can work in a culturally diverse school.
- If the existing project was to be repeated, artists working alongside teachers in schools should ensure there is additional time for the artist to be in the staff room over lunchtime to support the rest of the staff who may need to be reminded of a task when planning schemes of work.
- Travelling Light should consider offering teacher development support particularly for ECT teachers who are inexperienced and need support with their use of voice, presence, and confidence. This could be classroom based or as a twilight. Travelling Light could also consider working with University or Initial Teacher Training providers to offer similar bespoke INSET for new teachers.

Travelling Light has developed a team of experience artists who have gained skills in working with teachers in the field of continuous professional development and learning. The LUSL project has been well received in schools, often exceeding expectations, and it is hoped that the legacy of the project will be long-lasting.

“The project itself, has now come to an end. It has achieved far more than we thought it would...What LUSL has helped us to explore is that you can use drama for teaching pretty much anything.”

(Comment from a Headteacher, Teacher Reflection Day: June 2023).

The 2-year Light Up School Learning was funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Teacher Development Fund.



To find out more about the project and/or to read the full evaluation report, please contact Travelling Light on info@travellinglighttheatre.org.uk