

# CREATIVE *writing* THROUGH THE ARTS

Summary Report  
2016-2017 School Year

 Paul Hamlyn  
Foundation

ROYAL  
OPERA  
HOUSE  
**BRIDGE**

### Funders:

This programme is funded through the Paul Hamlyn Foundation *More and Better* fund (from 2016-2019). Further investment in the programme occurs through schools, with each participating school providing resources to pay for teacher cover, to match co-investment funding from the Royal Opera House Bridge.

### Participating Teachers and Schools (Cohort One):

Chris Seccombe	Stock Church of England Primary
Claire Usher	South Green Infant and Nursery
Emma Pattison	Deneholm Primary
Hannah Bennett	Westborough
Jade Debelius	Rayleigh Primary
Jodi Williams	Sunnymede Infants
Kathryn Wilkins	Horndon on the Hill
Lisa Quinn	Wickford Junior
Natalie Law	Riverside Primary
Rikki Jones	East Tilbury Primary and Nursery
Rosie Daly	Aveley Primary
Sally Bowman	Grange Primary
Samantha Ryan	Brightside Primary
Vicki Johnson	Crays Hill Primary

### Programme Management:

Sarah Goldsmith – Assistant Headteacher, Northwick Park Primary Academy

### Steering Group (2016-17, Programme Year 1):

Sally Manser (Chair) - Head of Royal Opera House Bridge

Lyn Corduroy – Headteacher, Grange Primary School

Tony Ward – Director, Billericay Teaching School Alliance

Sarah Goldsmith – Assistant Headteacher, Northwick Park Primary School

Geraldine Davis – Principal Lecturer, Anglia Ruskin University

Paulette Luff – Senior Lecturer, Anglia Ruskin University

Roxie Curry – Programme Manager (Essex & Southend), Royal Opera House Bridge

### Research team:

Geraldine Davis, Paulette Luff, Mallika Kanyal, Faye Acton, Niamh O'Brien and Alison Feist with support from Katie Murray and Rebecca Graves, Department of Education, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge and Chelmsford, UK.

## Report authors:

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## The programme:

The primary aim of the *Creative Writing through the Arts (CWttA)* programme is to promote children's creative writing skills through integration of writing with dance, drama, film and music and visual art activities in primary school classrooms (from Foundation Stage to Year Six). Additionally, the programme aims to build teachers' confidence and skills in teaching through the arts, establish a peer learning network and strengthen the local cultural education infrastructure.

In the 2016-2017 school year fifteen primary schools from five Teaching Schools Alliances in South Essex joined the programme and fourteen took part (one withdrew). Each school identified a class teacher to participate in specific professional development activities across the year. Creative practitioners provided full day 'inspiration' workshops for the cohort of teachers. These were:

- Chris Whitney, <http://chriswhitney.co.uk/about>, for film education (Autumn term);
- Sonia Hyams and Ross Bolwell-Williams from Emergency Exit Arts <http://www.eea.org.uk/>, for drama (Spring term);
- Lucy Blazheva <https://lucyblazhevadance.com/>, for dance (Summer term).

Each of the arts workshops gave teachers the opportunity to try out, discuss and reflect upon a range of practical activities and teaching and learning strategies that they could adapt to use in their work with pupils of different ages. The workshops were followed up by visits within school, by the artists, to support the embedding of workshop ideas into teaching practice. Simultaneously, all participating schools were encouraged to register with Artsmark and commit to working towards the Artsmark award.

## The research

The evaluation of the project is being undertaken by researchers from Anglia Ruskin University. The teachers are co-researchers and they engaged in one full day event and termly twilight meetings to support the carrying out of action research to evaluate the implementation of the project in their classrooms. Children's participation and gaining their views about the arts activities and their writing, via listening to pupil voice is also a key aspect of the project, discussed at each twilight session. The teachers decided upon a main research question:

### The research question:

In what ways do creative arts impact upon children's engagement and development as writers?

### Methods of collecting data:

- Each teacher identified nine children from her/his class and collected an initial sample of writing and one piece of writing in response to the creative work each term (four pieces of work per child in total). These were assessed independently by a writing consultant
- Teachers used a variety of means to collect pupils' views about the project activities and their writing (supported by university researchers with expertise in children's participation).

- Teachers produced written narratives of their experiences each term.
- At each twilight meeting teachers gave a verbal update, shared evidence from their classrooms and reported on benefits of the project for children, themselves and the school.
- At a final celebration event, teachers displayed the outcomes of the project in their classroom and produced a summary poster to report their action research

In addition, as part of the evaluation:

- Headteachers completed a self-assessment tool at the beginning and end of the project, as a basis for reflection upon the opportunities for creative learning on offer in their school.
- Headteachers were interviewed in the final half term of the academic year to explore their experiences of the programme so far.
- Teachers completed questionnaires at the beginning and end of the project year.

## Key Findings:

Main findings, from across all data sources, include:

### Children's writing

Children's progress in writing is evident. Children developed their writing and increased their confidence in writing, and this **improvement in writing** was attributed by teachers and children to the creative activities used in the classroom. In addition, the arts activities provided the children with interesting experiences and thus offered stimuli and **inspiration for writing**. Analysis of writing samples showed notable increases in the amount, variety and type of **vocabulary** used and greater use of detailed **description**. This was the case with a wide variety of genres of writing and across the three creative inputs. The use of film and drama and dance in teaching supported children to plan and **structure** their writing more effectively and to write more creatively with generation and expression of ideas demonstrating increased use of **imagination** (compared with baseline samples). Children worked with greater **independence** and **sustained** writing for longer periods of time.

### Children's learning

Children's **engagement with learning** was also strong. Children showed emotions of excitement and anticipation together with enjoyment, enthusiasm, pride and passion for their work. This was shown across all art forms, as were high levels of engagement and **participation**. Children's attitudes to learning were positive, they were **motivated** to write and enjoyed the different activities. There was strong evidence of children's **critical thinking**. This included careful listening and analysis of sounds (in film), forming and discussing opinions (in film), generating ideas (drama), justification of ideas, opinions and decisions using evidence (film, drama and dance), developing questioning skills (drama), and careful thinking and self-reflection (dance). Children engaged in **discussion and team work**, in all three art forms. They **shared ideas**, took turns, worked in pairs, observed one another and were supportive of each other. Teachers supported pupils to think about the qualities of their writing and to identify different ways to improve. This self-reflection was especially noted in relation to dance. Pupils indicated growing levels of **confidence** with specific tasks and with writing in general.

### Teachers

Teachers have increased their **confidence** and **skills** in teaching through the arts. Initial nerves and doubts were overcome, and teachers gained and used **new ideas**, enjoyed lesson preparation, embraced challenges, were excited to share ideas with the children in their classes and were impressed with the ways that creative lessons could benefit the children. The teachers **took risks** in trying new techniques, such as 'teacher in role', from drama. Teachers expressed feelings of achievement, **accomplishment** and **pride** in themselves and the children in their classes. They were

aware of **building trust** and of **shared learning** between themselves and the children in their classes. Teachers developed **action research skills** and ways of **listening to pupil voice**, with greater emphasis upon children expressing their views and taking account of these views. Participating teachers have sustained their professional network both face to face during training and mentoring sessions and virtually through use of social media and recognise the learning they have gained from each other. This also combats the demotivating effect of professional isolation.

### Schools

Some teachers became recognised as experts in teaching through the arts and began to **advise others** within their schools. All teachers are **sharing with their colleagues** both formally and informally; parents and **families are becoming involved**; and the programme is included in School Development Plans. School wide developments towards the achievement of Artsmark awards vary between schools and progress is generally slow. Having the programme supported and managed by the Assistant Headteacher of a Platinum Artsmark School has, however, strengthened the relationships between schools and has proved to be both efficient and effective. Additional Artsmark support has been planned for 2017/18 academic year.

### Developing local cultural education infrastructure

ROH Bridge have a remit from Arts Council England to help schools and cultural organisations increase children's access to cultural learning in Essex since 2012 and will continue this work until 2022. All CWttA training has been located in local creative spaces. This has helped to broaden teachers' understanding about how to access the cultural assets on their doorstep.

*Creative Writing Through the Arts* is part of an expanded programme of cultural learning and leadership across South Essex and a local cultural education partnership (LCEP) is expected to emerge in both Southend on Sea and Thurrock during 2018. During the life of the CWttA programme (2016 -19) an over-arching long term plan for cultural learning in Southend, supported by key stakeholders, will be created. Thurrock Council has also recently developed a cultural strategy referencing the cultural learning needs of children and young people. A mature Cultural Champion and Leadership programme for teachers is embedded in the Thurrock Trailblazer initiative which has Council and ROH investment secured until 2020.

In order to capitalise on the commitment of five Teaching School Alliances in South Essex to this work the Royal Opera House is bringing its annual conference to South Essex College in Southend on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

Early findings from this work have been shared amongst funders, participating schools and Higher Education networks. Wider exploration of emerging themes will be included in the ROH Bridge 2018 conference.

### Full report:

The full end of year report for the first year of the project, prepared by Anglia Ruskin University, is available to download at: <http://arro.anglia.ac.uk/702478/>

Findings from this year will be analysed together with findings from the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years and a full Creative Writing through the Arts project report will be available at the end of 2019.