

CREATIVE SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP
INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND ON THE PROGRAMME

The Creative Schools Partnership Programme is a three year programme, funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), Education Authority (EA) and the Urban Villages Initiative (UV). It aims to improve outcomes for young people from disadvantaged areas and backgrounds and support them in contributing to positive change within Urban Village communities. The partnership meets a collective ambition to improve community cohesion, support government priorities and reduce educational inequalities. A pilot Creative Schools Partnership programme ran between January 2018 and October 2018.

The Urban Villages Initiative is designed to improve community relations and develop thriving places where there has been a history of deprivation and tension. It is a headline action within the Together: Building a United Community (TBUC) Strategy, one of the Northern Ireland Executive's key strategy objectives within the Programme for Government (PfG). Community consultation and wider stakeholder engagement has informed the creation of Strategic Frameworks that identify the challenges and strengths of each of the Urban Village areas. These frameworks are designed to join up delivery by central and local government and wider stakeholders in support of the TBUC Strategy's overarching priorities as well as PfG outcomes.

The five Urban Village areas are:

- Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan (North Belfast).
- Colin (West Belfast).
- Lower Part of the Newtownards Road – known as Eastside (East Belfast).
- Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and the Markets areas (South Belfast).
- The Bogside, Bishop Street and Fountain (Derry / Londonderry).

Eligibility is limited to 12 schools located either within a core area or wider areas of influence¹. The core area provides a focal point for action and investment within each area. The concept of a wider area of influence, that is not sharply defined, acknowledges that thriving places require wider connection to both physical and social assets.

The programme goals were to:

- Improve outcomes for young people living in designated Urban Village areas.
- Support the delivery of school development priorities.

¹ In 2018/19 12 schools were eligible. Lisneal College has been invited to take part from September 2019

- Strengthen connection between young people, post-primary schools and the local community.
- Contribute to key aims of the Urban Villages Initiative which include fostering positive community identities and building community capacity.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

I have produced three evaluation reports for the Creative Schools Partnership programme:

- A pilot report in June 2018.
- A first year report in September 2019.
- An interim second year report in June 2020.

Each of these provides detailed case studies of each of the schools in the programme. This report integrates all this content by analysing the themes in the material. The report can be read at three levels of detail:

- If you want the key points, follow the bold text in the sections, most of which outline mechanisms.
- If you want more detail on the mechanisms, read the quote boxes.
- If you want more detail on the projects, consult the appendix or the other reports.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

My methodology consisted of:

- Review of documentation: applications, assessment systems, School Improvement Plans, planning documents.
- Creation of a format for systematic observation to be completed by the project manager and teachers, and analysis of the results. Data were compiled and analysed for each of the three years.
- Face-to-face interviews with project lead teachers, head teachers, and artists. Interviews were carried out in each of the schools in the pilot and first year.
- Face-to-face interviews with students. I interviewed 127 students across the pilot and first year of the programme.
- Participation in two learning workshops.

IMPACT ON THE YOUNG PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

The outcomes described below - wellbeing, confidence, team working, engagement in learning - were identified as applying by the vast majority of the interviewees – typically all students who were not already strong in that area, and many who were. I have tested these claims of outcomes by exploring attribution, adopting a Scientific Realist approach that talks about mechanisms – the route whereby outcomes are generated. Analysis of mechanisms gives the added benefit of being able to understand the extent to which outcomes are due to inherent features of the arts or to the model of delivery/project-based learning. This important distinction is picked up in the conclusions.

CONFIDENCE

Students increased their confidence on the programme through:

- **Feeling that their individuality was understood and appreciated.** Having opportunities for creative expression gave students a feeling of being heard and validated as people.

In St. Cecilia's College, the artist explained that: "Placing students at the centre of activities, giving them license to lead, shape, and create their project is a confidence booster in itself. Through practical activities, being viewed or heard back within minutes of creation, we are able to reflect on successes and areas of improvement. Each discussion is an opportunity to boost a participant's confidence, regardless of the task outcome, as our starting point for each evaluation of tasks is congratulating participants for trying."

- **Feeling their ideas were valued.** The artistic process often included a stage of stimulating ideas but then shaping and combining them using an overall aesthetic or purpose. Students described this as more nourishing than in class, where students' ideas were often presented as if in opposition, with the implication that only one was 'the right answer'. The moulding process didn't just pick up students' ideas, but often improved them, as if revealing some hidden value that only the artist could see.

In the Mercy College Year 1 project, students describe the process of finding their voice: "It feels good playing different roles and seeing the audience boosts your confidence. Even when I am not in Drama, I am no longer quiet. I am a completely different person. You feel more confident and able to speak out more." "I wasn't shy in primary school, well a wee bit. But if it came to someone insulting me, I would take it to heart. Now I know that I have the power to say" that isn't true or I am way better than that."

- **Being given responsibility.** Projects placed students in positions of responsibility whether with people (e.g. interviewing businesses, officials or members of the public for a newspaper or film), or objects (e.g. being entrusted with expensive items of equipment such as cameras or musical instruments).

- **Improving their communication skills by learning specific techniques.** Communication is inherent in the arts. Students learnt about: voice projection and open body language in drama and film-making; about framing interviewing questions and literary devices while producing a newsletter; and about messaging and design while curating a photography exhibition.

The artist for St. Cecilia's College mentions three mechanisms to improve communication: 1) having to communicate clearly in the group to ensure each member understood their roles and responsibilities; 2) having to create short questions with prompts for community interviews; and 3) reflecting on how songs communicate different emotions.

- **Finding they could talk to people outside their usual friendship group.** The arts projects invariably brought together students from different classes, years or schools.

In the St Joseph's Boys School Year 1 project, students said their confidence increased because of the different people in the community they had to interview. "You are talking to all these people and you realise you can do it without them wondering what you are doing. I met the Mayor."

- **Having - through the arts - a broad range of possibilities to find their special talent.** The projects gave different students a chance to shine.
- **Finding that they already had valuable skills they didn't know they had.** Students revealed strong abilities e.g. visual acuity from using social media, poetry from rap.
- **Feeling special from being included in an arts project and present at launch events.** Students were very aware of being selected to take part in the projects and often achieved a status or visibility in the school from the process or the product.

In Ashfield Girls High School, the Programme Manager observed that the 2nd year project built students' confidence because of: 1) the individual attention during the project: "These girls are being valued, they know that there has been an investment in them both emotionally, educationally and financially. They have been given their own ukulele and have been allowed to take it home; they are going to be writing their own songs and forming their own band." 2) The feeling of being special: "For the pupils, the prospect of returning to Kilcronaghan for an overnight stay is an important aspect of the project. They feel privileged to be the only Y9 class involved in a residential." 3) And the positive working environment: "The fact too that these girls were getting access to W5 and yet again like last year we were in the most magnificent surroundings of the glass panelled boardroom of W5, these are special experiences all of which make you feel special and valued."

- **Receiving praise and encouragement.** Students appreciated receiving positive feedback, often very detailed and specific to them, which had an added status because of coming from a professional artist.

In the Belfast Model For Girls Year 1 project students said their confidence increased because of the positive feedback. "It has made me feel better about myself because the

artists say what I have done is really good.” “The artists encouraged us to do things and not be afraid, give it a go, even if you are scared. They encouraged us to do new things.”

- **Feeling more powerful because of a potential impact on an audience.** It was evident from interviews that students often had quite different worries from their parents’ generation and wanted to express these: they were more concerned with climate change and mental health than with religious difference. This is an important finding for agencies seeking to reduce sectarianism.

In the St Genevieve’s High School 2nd year the teacher concluded that: “Students’ self-esteem improved because they were given the opportunity to realise that they were able to succeed in a new area of learning and were praised and recognised for what they were doing. Their self-belief was further strengthened by their work and achievements from the sessions being shared with staff and the whole school community through school notice boards, social media – Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.”

- **Replacing voices of internal criticism with a voice saying ‘you can do it’.** Students picked up the artists’ thought processes from their explanation or feedback.

In the Mercy College pilot project students reported losing their fear of being judged. “There are people you would be scared of talking to because you would be judged. But in drama it isn’t you being judged, it is the character.” “The drama project has taken me out of my comfort zone. I used to be really shy. But now I can talk to people. Your friends are there. You are not being yourself. You are being a character. They can’t judge. They are judging the character.” “I get bad anxiety. But in drama I feel no one will judge so you can just be yourself.”

- **Gaining a sense of achievement.** As with other project-based activity, students gained from seeing a process through. The arts added an element of achievement because the project – whether a film, show, publication or an exhibition – was emotionally charged and complex.

In Ashfield Boys High School’s pilot project, students said that that the project increased their confidence in writing because: “I have learnt that stories can come from anywhere and writing is more than just writing. It is the creative part too.”

In Belfast Model For Boys 2nd year project, the teacher said that: “Many of the pupils described their feelings of being privileged to have been selected to take part in the project. They told me that they were the type of boys who “never get picked for anything” as they are generally well behaved and a lot of projects are geared at engaging less motivated children. They described the sense of pride that they would be making a piece of sculpture that would be displayed for years to come in the school building.”

Belfast Model For Girls students explained how achievement is more visible in the project. “After we made the art, on Friday, we saw all the artwork, with the light. It boosts your confidence to see what you have created. It can be a bit stressful sometime but when you

see it you feel proud of it.” “Your work goes into the show rather than into a score or mark that you don’t get back. This is something we are doing something with.”

Belfast Model For Boys year one students described the satisfaction from producing a photographic exhibition: “We had a huge freedom in how we put it together. Creating something that will actually happen. A lot of projects in school are hypothetical.”

- **Producing artwork that they could take home to show their families.** Schools described the arts project as the only positive conversation that they had had with some parents in a while.
- **Extending their boundaries.** The arts project took students to places and types of buildings many had not previously visited. Taking Protestant students to a gallery in the Republic added another element of cross-over.

The Programme Manager accompanied a group of St. Vincent’s Centre students to a performance by Arch 8 at Young At Art Festival in the Mac Theatre, which was their first school visit to a theatre. The play was chosen because it was relevant to teenage boys, inspired by the video game Tetris, but was nonetheless rather challenging because the performance was nonverbal/physical theatre and most of the audience were Primary School children. The Programme Manager reported that: “All of the students, watched, reacted and engaged. Their behaviour was excellent throughout and for the final 30 minute session all but one student engaged in the audience participation. The students were definitely a little anxious at the beginning just prior to the performance as they had absolutely no idea of what was going to happen. This was quite an experimental piece of theatre for their first visit but in hindsight it worked well.”

WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

The arts projects supported wellbeing through creating moments of joy and enjoyment. Students described the arts projects as being enjoyable because of:

- **The multisensory and vivid nature of the arts experience.** The arts provide an immersive experience for the senses and emotions.

In the St. Colm’s High School 2nd year project the teacher observed that: “The African drumming sessions saw full participation, which was amazing given the number of autistic and severely anxious children that we have in the group. It was truly humbling to watch these young people slowly start to shed their fears and anxieties and actually enjoy the creative processes.”

At St Vincent Centre the head teacher explained that the: “Attachment disorder and trauma affects the development of the imagination. We are trying to patch skills that children in a mainstream school might have but these pupils won’t have because they live in a flight or fight mode all the time. Making clay figures engaged the imagination. They have to imagine their creation before forming it.”

- **The variety of activities and tasks in an arts session.** The projects gave students access to materials the schools didn't have, and the artists showed new techniques which expanded the possibilities in class.

In the Belfast Model For Girls Pilot project, all students said they enjoyed the project. They particularly liked playing with different materials and techniques, so that each session was new and exciting.

"I really like the freedom part of it. Usually in a classroom you are sitting with the same people, listening to the teacher going over and over the same thing. In the arts class you are free to express what you think." "In an average class you sit in the same seat and look at the same teacher. In the art class you are always moving on, it is different things and it actually will help you in everyday life." "In an average class you are stuck: you are doing the same thing for weeks. Here we are given a new thing each week and we can change it. Give our ideas to the project." Students at St Cecilia's College

- **The time to develop their work.** Project-based approaches give students the chance to develop their work to the stage where they are satisfied with it and so are more aware of what can be achieved with dedication and effort. They experiment, make mistakes and learn from them, and reflect around a goal rather than being entirely goal-driven. Several students said they were more motivated than in class, where they might feel there was insufficient time to do things well so they wouldn't bother at all.

Students from Mercy College's year one project explained that: "In class you are always told what to do. It is very draining."

- **The contact with professional artists.** Artists were described as charismatic, empathetic, sensitive, open and non-judgemental so that students felt heard and valued as individuals, as well as connected to the world of work.
- **The scaffolding of learning.** Perhaps because of the time available, and perhaps because of the artists' ability to unpack their practice, students often felt they had more support with their learning. Students learned stages to improve their writing, drawing, filming etc.

In the Ashfield Boys High School pilot project, the students said Fighting Words' step-by step process made writing easy because: "You get to use your imagination and make up characters. Then you get to write stories about the characters you made up."

At St. Colm's High School the teacher explained that: "During our poetry workshops there was much "thinking aloud" from both facilitators in a bid to model the thinking process for the young people, and also from students, which aided them in their writing process."

- **The non-judgemental environment.** Artists typically circle between phases of open expression/exploration, and phases of shared critique/decision-making, with each stage

potentially opened up and reframed at the next. Students often experienced this as very freeing.

A student at Ashfield Girls High School described the music and writing residential as “more natural”: “I felt more relaxed. It felt like home. Rather than tied up in school uniform and having to be quiet.”

Students at Ashfield Boys High School described the writing project as relaxing. “It is not as stressing as a class. You can work at your own pace and mix your ideas with other peoples. This makes it a lot easier to create a piece of writing that is unique and everyone is doing the same thing. It is easier sharing and spreading your story across the whole group rather than writing a whole story yourself.” “It is more comfortable and makes you feel you can share the ideas you have. The way it is presented. The teachers are not in front of you. The teacher sits with you. Everyone contributes to the group.”

- **Visits to arts venues.** Students reacted very positively to visiting the galleries, theatre and museums. They frequently described the experience as new, inspiring and relaxing. Several students said that they would visit galleries and museums themselves when they wanted somewhere quiet to reflect, and we know that some made a habit of this.
- **Depth of engagement with other people.** Arts projects had a special dynamic, which brought together students who might otherwise not have met (including those from different backgrounds and religions) and provided a positive and safe context to talk about profound issues of identity, belief and mental health, while also understanding each other as individuals. It is likely that this deep connection will naturally reduce sectarian feelings, without being seen to require this in a didactic way.

Many of the projects were specifically designed to improve students’ mental health, for example, in the St. Cecilia’s College pilot project, students trialled and filmed different creative and sporting activities and lifestyle changes and rated each in terms of its ability to affect their mood/mental health. The project led to students making changes in their lives for the sake of their mental health: exercising more, being more organised, reducing their consumption of energy drinks, going to bed earlier, and talking to their friends and family more.

As well as enjoyment, the Creative Schools Partnership programme enhanced mental health and wellbeing through:

- **Enabling students to externalise feelings and experiences and so gain perspective.**
- **Developing feelings of mastery and competence.**

For example in the St. Colm’s High School 2nd year, the teacher reported that: “One boy who is extremely introverted discovered a musical talent he didn’t know he had and this has made such a difference for him. Another girl, who suffers from chronic anxiety, benefitted immensely from the creative writing workshops and went on to produce insightful and engaging poetry. This has gone a long way to giving her an outlet for her anxiety and raising

her self-belief.” Students also had their concerns validated by the artists, for example: “The artist encouraged the students to talk and to interact, she had been very honest in sharing with them her fears, her struggles and how she had to overcome them. I think she offered them hope – not in a sympathetic way but rather in a supportive, concrete manner.”

- **Helping students to channel their feelings positively.**
- **Giving a route for students to express themselves and in some cases experience catharsis.**

The St. Vincent’s Centre 2nd year project was designed for: “pupils to design their own freeze frame or dramatic production detailing the consequences of conflict and more specifically of not dealing with their emotions, which may give rise to this conflict. This dramatic piece was to accompany music which was designed to show the rise and fall of different emotions in line with the story being presented.”

- **Giving students a method (e.g. drawing, visiting a gallery) to manage their emotions.**
- **Creating a soothing effect by the use of arts materials** (e.g. the tactile effect of clay, the visual impact of colour).

In St Vincent Centre’s year one project, the Programme manager observed a session where students were using objects such as a grater or toothbrush to create hair in the clay figures and said: “This was one of the most rewarding learning experiences that I have seen with these boys; they were totally engaged, calm and relaxed working together.”

- **Refining students’ ability to make choices** (e.g. characterisation in drama or debriefing processes).

At St. Colm’s High School the teacher commented that: “The children had full autonomy over their choice of music to mix which would later accompany their poems in a school performance. This process allowed them to experiment with their learning and to take risks by losing the fear of making mistakes. It was truly enlightening to see their confidence grow at points like this on our creative schools’ journey.”

- **Removing the usual hierarchies in class.**

“Some people are really good at Maths, but in this group everyone has their own skills. It helps people be natural.” Student at St Cecilia’s College

- **Giving students an increased sense of control over their lives.**

Belfast Model For Girls student: “Normally in art you are told what to do, and not allowed to do anything different. Here, the artist asked us what we want to do next, what characters we wanted to create.”

- **Generating intense concentration and so distracting participants from their problems.**

- **Placing students in/near nature for some activities** (e.g. drawing or pottery-making).
- **Giving students individual attention**, which is not possible with large class sizes.
- **Giving a shared experience and feeling of connection.**

At Ashfield Girls High School, the 1st year project, the Programme Manager said that: “There is a sense of connectedness, which has been evident ever since their return from their residential last year. This group of girls have bonded well as a group and they are supportive of each other.”

In the Mercy College pilot project, students described feeling closer to other participants by sharing views. “Before in class I wouldn’t have got on with people. In the drama workshop you see people in a completely different light. They are more open. It is like two sections of the school. In drama you are comfortable. You connect with everyone. Drama develops more of your personal skills and helps social anxiety. It has really helped.” “I am now much more open. I have seen that many other people share my opinions.”

Some schools realised the power of the arts projects and so continued the activity during lockdown. For example Ashfield Girls High School had a writing and ukulele project that sustained students’ motivation and supported their mental health. The literature artist produced a resource that explained that: “Writing is always good. Nobody needs to see it. Write for yourself, write to get rid of annoyance and frustration (but maybe be careful about keeping it hidden!). Write out your dreams and your fears. Write a list of the things you’re looking forward to when lockdown is over.” Comments from students suggested strong engagement, for example, one wrote: “It is very interesting to see that actually quite a lot of authors wrote during tough times. I find this very inspiring.”

TEAM-WORKING

The arts projects enhanced students’ team-working skills by:

- **Increasing empathy** through e.g. character or narrative development, interviewing or considering the audience.

For St. Cecilia’s College 2nd year project, the teacher recorded that: “The whole project is looking at ideas to help our city become a SMART City, which means pupils have to show empathy to their end users (the community). They are regularly asked to look at solutions from this point of view.”

- **Encouraging curiosity about other people’s ideas.** Students came to understand that one person doesn’t have all the answers; that other people are a source of ideas, knowledge and support, and that working together is easier than struggling alone. As one interviewee at St. Cecilia’s College explained: “It has made me think that everyone thinks differently. It has taught me not to judge other people. And to try to mash our

ideas together because then they benefit everyone. Joining part of my idea and part of someone else's."

- **Giving students a role to support others.**

In the St Genevieve's High School second year project, students from the first year acted as mentors to the participants.

- **Sharing spaces and equipment.**

In the St Vincent Centre year one project, the teacher reported that students learnt to be respectful of each other when: producing models of each other; taking turns in using the equipment; managing the details of the mixing process (timing, texture, beat, mood); appreciating students difference taste in music. One student who liked Tchaikovsky got a round of applause when his peers heard what it sounded like mixed with a strong beat.

- **Demonstrating or requiring interdependency because of safety or other practical requirements.** As a student at St. Cecilia's College explained, roles are different in arts projects because: "At school you do work in groups but not as much and not working equally without a leader."

In the Blessed Trinity College pilot project, the animation had two roles - one person does the movements and the other takes the pictures - and the two need to be in tune: "There is constant direction. So you get good at being critical of someone's animation without being unkind. Criticism is done quickly so you can't be precious." The project demonstrated the value of working together because: "Ideas are contagious and idea generation is contagious."

- **Creating collaborative products.**

Students at the Mercy College pilot project said that the arts take learning beyond the individual. "There are group discussions about what you want. Acting isn't individual work. In class, learning is usually individual."

- **Building students' confidence to work with different people.**

A student from the Blessed Trinity Year one project said that they were more accepting of other people. "Talking to people you have never really talked to before means you can accept everyone and their opinions."

ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING

Creative Schools Partnership increased students' ability to engage in learning through:

- **Suiting different learning styles.** Students often reported that they preferred learning in the arts project because the sessions were more active intellectually and physically. A

common comment was that the arts project made learning more enjoyable or made them feel that they were not working at all even though they were.

Belfast Model For Girls student: “I am a kinaesthetic learner. The project is really good for me. It is like I am actually being able to know things, things are going into my head, whereas usually they just shoot right out of my head. I started learning more things.”

Blessed Trinity College students said the arts project: “Is a different way of learning because you are active. It is easier to pay attention because you are not sitting in one place all day; you can do your own thing.” “You get to use more technology. It is lots of different subjects all in one. You don’t have to do a lot of writing. It is more interactive.”

A Mercy College student suggested that more attention to the auditory experience would strengthen teaching: “More teachers should be qualified in Drama so they can make the subject more interesting. Instead of the teacher speaking in a flat voice. It helps your understanding.”

Ashfield Boys High School said they could concentrate more in the arts project: “Normally you are sitting still. It is easier to focus if you are moving around. Otherwise you are looking around all the time.” “I was using my brain more. Normally you sit in silence and focus on the one thing.”

- **Strengthening students’ critical thinking skills.** The projects included stages where students had to reflect on issues (e.g. the environment, drug abuse, bullying, health), develop their own opinions, refine these into ideas or message with other students or partners, and think about how to reflect these creatively, all with an eye on the audience experience. Where artistic expression often differs from other project-work is in the layering, the scope to embrace complexity and ambiguity in the presentation.

At Ashfield Girls High School the Programme Manager reported that: “The writer and scientist used different forms of questioning encouraging the girls to think for themselves and to make connections with previous experiences in their lives. They were asked for their own opinions and had to make judgements during the presentation. They were also making many connections between science and the arts and being encouraged to think “how and why does music impact on us” – all of our minds were opened up and great debate came from our discussion of Emer’s presentation/talk.”

In St. Cecilia’s College, the artist mentioned that: “To engage critical thinking in relation to recording and filming techniques, we experimented with shot sizes, and microphone placement before playing footage back to pupils, asking opinions of how each clip looked and sounded.”

In Belfast Model For Boys’ second year project, the teacher thought that in the walking tour of sculptures: “The artist speaking with the pupils about the sculpture, and talking about the history and background of each, naturally developed pupil thinking skills in terms of how they might use various techniques in designs for our school sculpture.” The artist asked the

students to consider in groups questions like: What is it made of? What do you think it weighs? How do you think it was built? What did it cost? What was the art saying?

- **Developing students' initiative.**

In Lisneal College's second 2nd year project, the teacher said that: "This project gave the students the opportunity to put into action some of their own toolkit, ideas and stories together as a group. The students became more independent learners and thinkers as they had to organise themselves, think of a storyline, create characters/action/dialogue and manage their own behaviours as they created their own piece of scriptwriting." The Programme Manager observed that: "The students were very excited about developing their own ideas and were confident in making their own decisions about the development of their work. They were thinking for themselves, referring to films and other storylines they were familiar with but also connecting and making reference to real live issues and experiences." And "The students are leading their own learning and are enthused and energised by it. They want to use their own voices; they are valuing the opportunity and are keen now to learn the technical side and to see the development of their ideas to screen."

In the St Vincent Centre year one project, the artist gave an overall structure but also drew attention to areas of choice for the students to direct. Students gained a greater sense of, and comfort with, individuality through the exercise of creating mini busts of each other; and through learning to work independently.

Students from Mercy College's year one project explained how they felt more independent. "You feel very mature in drama because you are thinking a lot. In class you don't feel very independent. You don't feel the age you actually are. In drama you feel independent and free."

- **Giving more space for questioning.**

St Cecilia's College student: "I liked how it was an open-minded, creative space where we could express our ideas without being judged. In a class people don't want to speak out unless they are deemed wrong."

- **Modelling openness to learning.**

In Ashfield Girls High School second year project, the teacher thought that: "The science communicator's fun, casual approach encourages the girls to be free and experimental in their learning. The experience of holding, let alone tuning and attempting to play, the ukulele was completely novel to the majority of students. While everyone was excited to get started, most pupils struggled with very basics e.g. picking up and holding the ukulele the correctly and more technical aspects such as tuning, working out which way to turn which tuning pegs; operating a digital tuner; thumb-strumming and differentiating between strings. The girls know the artists plays guitar but the ukulele is new to her. Learning together creates a further connection. The artist's enthusiasm is motivating."

- **Showing students that they could concentrate for long periods of time when they were interested.**

In Belfast Model For Boys second year project, students needed complete concentration during their visit to the foundry because of the high stakes learning environment. The Programme Manager said “This was one of the most exciting workshops that I have been privy to.” In the workshop students made their own moulds based on impressions of their faces into which recycled molten aluminium would be poured. “This was a practical workshop where health and safety was paramount – we were all kitted out in boiler suits, protective hob nail boots (which we got to keep). The boys had to work in pairs to create their “pattern” into which molten aluminium would be poured. The nature of the process meant that the boys had to listen carefully and follow step-by-step instruction from the artist. There was no time for slacking as each process swiftly led into the next.”

- **Making learning more memorable.**

Students from Mercy College’s year one project said learning through the arts was more vivid and memorable: “In drama I remember everything I do because it is more physical and you have space to breath. If we had History as a drama lesson I would know everything.” “Just writing stuff won’t get it into your head. If you write stuff in your drama class, using activity, you understand more.” “If everything is written on paper you will remember less than 50%. With words that are active it sticks in your head more.” “Whenever you are trying to learn something but you don’t really understand: if you put a voice on, it gives you a wee bit more understanding.”

- **Showing the value of learning.** As with other practical learning, students were energised by the connection to future careers and work.

At St Genevieve's High School 2nd year. The Programme Manager thought that: the artist “is so encouraging and always building on the positive. The fact too that she is a past pupil and has been very successful in her own career is a wonderful role model for these students.” The teacher reported that some of the students had aspired towards a career in makeup, theatre and dance and were disengaged from school learning because they didn't see its relevance. Being part of the project showed them the amount of hard work involved in working in the creative industries, which meant that some re-engaged with school, either because they wanted to consider other careers or they could see the need to have good basic skills in the creative industries.

- **Making students more motivated and invested in the product.**

Students from Mercy College’s year one project said they were more open to feedback in the drama group because: “Everyone is looking at what can make your piece better, which is nerve-wracking but really fun because you know they are trying to help you. And you know you are going to get that adrenalin rush when you are on that stage.”

These skills and attitudes seemed to be transferable to other lessons. Teachers often remarked on the strong attendance of students at, but also after, the projects.

In the Mercy College year one project, a student who broke her ankle a few days before the final show insisted on coming in and taking part, and so her role was adapted to accommodate her being in a wheel chair.

In Ashfield Girls High School, the Programme Manager tells the story of one pupil: "A girl whose attendance is extremely sporadic and who could be classified as a school refuser, never misses a session during this programme and spoke of her love for musical theatre. She told us that she spent a lot of time at home playing her guitar and ukulele."

In Malone Integrated College's year one project, all 14 students attended every session with the artist, which was a significant increase on their previous attendance (in an average class of 20 four would be absent).

Students said that the positive associations from the project made them look forward to school more and feel that the school really did care about them. There is some evidence of impact on attainment, although this was not a focus of the evaluation.

At St Joseph's Boys School, the teacher reported that the students improved their attainment in Creative Writing Skills from the magazine project. 43% of the class achieved a higher grade than the previous time. The responses were longer. All except one achieved a C grade or above at the end of Year 8. A grade was achieved by 9 students, which is nine times more than would be expected.

Students felt very strongly that schools should have more arts projects.

Students at Mercy College said that schools would be letting students down by not teaching Drama and the arts: "I have a friend who would be so much more confident if she was involved in this. She has really good opinions. If she had this project she would be flying. Drama not being in primary schools is disgraceful. I want people to go into secondary schools being confident and drama gives that confidence." "It is disheartening that lots of people don't have drama in their lives. This means they don't have a voice. Drama should be obligatory. This school makes you feel very welcome so drama should be part of that." "Every school should do this because it has given us a voice instead of just learning about other people's stories."

IMPACT ON TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

Teachers varied in their familiarity with creative and project-based approaches. The arts projects providing a learning and developmental process for them as well as enhancing their wellbeing by providing greater freedom in pedagogy.

LEARNING ABOUT THE ARTS

Teachers learnt about specific **artistic techniques** that they can use in class, for example:

- In Mercy College, the teachers developed their skills in working with improvisation.
- In Blessed Trinity College, teachers learnt about types of animation, different software, and some of the skills involved in creating a quality piece in the first year of the project. In the second year, an English teacher used stop motion to show the different sentence types and film to tell the story of Lady Macbeth.
- In Malone Integrated College, teachers learnt about and started using Illustrator.
- In Belfast Model For Boys, a teacher increased his confidence in SLR cameras, creative angles and filters, and trained two other teachers in his department.

More important, perhaps, than the specific techniques teachers learnt was the appreciation of a **less directive and more student-led form** of teaching:

- In Blessed Trinity College teachers observed how some students flourished with the individual attention that was possible in the project's smaller groups. They saw how the artists were able to teach technique relatively quickly and efficiently by simplifying the process and breaking it into steps. They also saw how artists let students develop their own ideas, for example their own questions in the interviewing stage, where teachers might otherwise be tempted to "jump in and provide the answer".
- In Malone College, the teacher said that he was impressed with the calm and open way the artist worked and would try and adopt some of this style in his teaching. "The artist had a calming influence. As a teacher we are driven by a time line and always feel you are trying to cram things in. The artist had time for questions. She didn't mind the kids talking. She let the pupils take control. I will try and be a lot calmer. I loved the brainstorming and letting the pupils work together in twos and threes. Not forcing them together."
- The teacher at Mercy College made a similar observation. "The artist had a way of facilitating students rather than directing them. Teachers sometimes suffer from wanting to direct or over-direct. I realise if I get frustrated I tend to jump in with ideas. The artist has the ability to let ideas grow organically. I can very clearly see what it means for students to take ownership. I want to do more of this."

UNDERSTANDING HOW CREATIVE AND PROJECT BASED LEARNING IMPROVES PUPIL ENGAGEMENT

Teachers reinforced their **commitment to creative and project-based approaches** to teaching.

- At St Joseph Boys School, the teacher concluded that: “The most significant lesson is the value that is clearly evidenced in the pupil’s access to the arts and the impact that the arts has to inspire the most complex learners.”
- At St. Cecilia’s College, the teacher learnt about the value in terms of setting a long term goal and allowing freedom to get there: “Often in traditional teaching our vision is either too broad (you will achieve a GCSE) or too narrow (today we will learn about...). If we could set a clear and captivating vision, then let the students find their own path to it, how much more exciting would learning be?” And “There are no conditions set on participation, by which I mean everyone feels like they can get involved. The team never say “well you need to do x, y or z first”. The girls just know they will be able to do something and will be valued. As a teacher I struggle with the noise level and different conversations going on at the same time but I have to challenge myself about what learning looks like.”
- At Belfast Model For Boys, a teacher noted that: “Many of the boys said they much preferred the hands on approach to learning, being able to move around and engage with their environment while they learned and developed new skills.”
- At Ashfield Girls High School a teacher said that: “The school had already noticed the way creative projects increased student engagement. The students from the pilot project still talk about it and sing the song they wrote together. The video they produced is still shown in assemblies.

STRENGTHENING CONNECTION WITH PARENTS/CARERS

The arts projects provided a positive and open context in which to strengthen relationships with parents. This is very different from narrower communication with parents that is about problems or requests for contributions.

Connections took different forms:

- **Telling parents about the project.** For example, Ashfield Girls High School told parents/carers about the second year project individually during a parents evening in March 2020.
- **Including parents or other carers in the planning process.** For example, Mercy College’s second year project planning included interviews with parents and other members of the local community. Parents or grandparents were also invited on visits.

During the year one project the teacher at Mercy College said: “The project gave us an insight into how we can support parents. All parents came to the performance bar two. We also had grannies and aunts. One baked a cake for us. One acted as a welcome. More often we are asking for money or permission. This time we just wanted parents to celebrate and to see if they had noticed any difference in their kids.”

- **Inviting parents to workshops and sessions.** For example, Belfast Model For Girls invited parents to both art and drama sessions of the year one project and four came. In addition, one parent came on a trip to the Lyric Theatre and parents helped paint the backdrop for the show.
- **Including stories from the parents.** For example, Belfast Model For Girls’ year one project included asking parents about their homes were like when they were young and the show started with voiceovers made from recordings of what parents had said.
- **Showcasing the work to parents.** For example, St Joseph Boys School’s second year project plans to showcase the work for parents on three occasions.
- **Developing an ongoing dialogue with parents.** In its first year project, St. Colm’s High School organised four meetings to talk about wellbeing issues for parents. In September 2019, the structure was extended to parents of three other years and sessions covered subjects requested by parents e.g. on having difficult conversations around self-harm or suicide, signposting to services, and what to expect from health care providers.

IMPROVED MORALE

Teachers mentioned that the focus on mental health and creativity was helpful to them as well as the students and parents.

A teacher at St. Colm’s High School said: “The project was a really unifying force for the school. It brought staff together. We all have a role in strengthening mental health and this brought it to the forefront. Morale was low because of staff redundancies and suicides. It is now on the way up.”

Teachers also appreciated the opportunity for personal and professional development, which is a rare event in NI schools. Literature on arts education shows that arts teachers (across the arts) have higher morale when their own creative practice is supported.

IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic placed additional pressure on schools. It is not yet clear whether the arts will be squeezed out or whether schools will see the need to find creative and project-based ways to engage students. Until the pandemic, the organisational impact of the Creative Schools Partnership programme was strong.

EMBEDDING CREATIVE LEARNING

Schools had made substantial progress in embedding creative learning:

- **Incorporating creative approaches into the curriculum.**

In 2020, St Joseph Boys School was reviewing its KS3 Pathway structure, pedagogy and assessment with the aim of embedding creative arts approaches across the KS3 curriculum.

In 2019, St Cecilia's College committed to redesign Year 8 to embed creative learning. All heads of department were told to remove some of the content and to start to look at ways of being creative in the classroom. As the Head explained: "We have put the emphasis on the process. In the past, we have been very focused on the end result, the exam result. We have paid less heed to how they get that product. With artists the emphasis is on the process and learning through the process. Sometimes it will get you the result that you want and sometimes it won't. But there is personal ownership. There is learning to develop the end process. We found that the process sometimes gave a better end product and they have ownership of it. Not having control: not being able to fix things is going to be difficult for staff." As evidence of commitment, in June 2020, the school invited all pupils to take part in a creative challenge that arose from Creative School Partnerships.

In 2020, the teacher at St Genevieve's High School started developing an alternative curriculum, where disengaged students would study English, Maths and Science within the context of creative careers, and piloted the approach over six weeks. The teacher presented the project and this proposal to a SMT meeting, who agreed, before the lock-down, to expand the approach.

- **Upskilling teachers.**

In 2019, the Head at St. Cecilia's College wondered if teachers lacked confidence in teaching using creative approaches because of perceived lack of structure and so expanded the CPD element of the Creative Schools Partnership project for 2020 to include five teachers.

- **Involving teachers across the school.**

In St. Colm's High School's first year project, 29 teachers and six classroom assistants took part in a twilight session to design the doves, which is 85% of the staff. The teachers told us that this activity has helped to spread the word about the importance of creativity across the curriculum. "Being able to work in a relaxed and positive space on a creative project, has been cathartic. We need more sessions like this."

- **Creating a physical legacy.**

In St Joseph's Boys School, the publication produced from the pilot project, *Becoming Joe*, is being deployed to help with Year 8s' transition into the school.

In St. Colm's High School, the school is building a new park and some of the poetry from the first year project will be used on the hoarding for the site. Teachers are also considering other places to inscribe students' poetry e.g. the inner courtyard.

- **Considering creative approaches to assessment.**

In St. Cecilia's College, the teacher who led on the Creative Schools Partnership project has responsibility for the KS3 curriculum review in the school. She is considering ways to use film to document achievement. "It can be hard to capture teaching outcomes. There is a lot of focus on the summative testing. Film allows us to measure engagement. It captures a process and the outcome. It provides ownership. And film reminds them of what they have learnt. When they leave school they won't remember some of the dry content in lessons, but they will remember the film. I would completely reconsider how I capture students' skills development. We are so paperwork driven. This project has completely changed how I would allow students to articulate their progress. They could be talking to an iPad or writing a blog."

SUPPORTING INTERDEPARTMENTAL WORKING

The Creative Schools Partnership projects **brought teachers and departments together**. For example:

- Mercy College second year project brought together Drama, English, Art and Media Studies. History and English teachers volunteered to help in the drama workshops. A teacher from Design and Technology made back up masks to be used in rehearsals and stands for the masks to be placed at the front of the stage during the show. These three departments each asked to be involved in future arts projects. The teacher thought that connection was helpful because: "Having a multidisciplinary project allowed all children to engage. It showed them the connections between the artforms."
- St Joseph Boys School's second year project involved ICT, Technology and Design, Maths and English.
- In Ashfield Girls High School, the pilot project combining the arts with science and therefore communicated the creativity and rigour of both. The teacher thought

collaboration looked positive to the students: “Cross-curricular learning and collaboration between English, Science and Music departments has a positive impact on students. The girls respond well to seeing staff working together, out of their subject areas – they seem more animated and are excited to demonstrate / explain information to teachers of another discipline.”

- Malone Integrated College year 2 project connects Art and Design, Literacy and Drama.
- Belfast Model For Boys second year project combined Media, Art, History, Geography, Maths and Environmental Science.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY LINKS

The programme connected the schools to different groups:

- **Day care centres and community organisations.** Blessed Trinity College developed a relationship with Newington Day Centre. The project included a bus tour of North Belfast for students and senior citizens together which allowed the group to reflect on their shared community identity and share stories as they decided how to represent the area in their film. Intergenerational work was especially powerful.

St Vincent Centre worked with Mullan Mews, a supported housing scheme for people living with dementia. The Head explained: “Working with residents brought out sides of the pupils we don’t often see like patience and understanding. This protectiveness came out of them. They recognise their own vulnerability in these older people.”

Belfast Model For Girls worked with the Fold. The teacher said: “It was like a love affair between the girls and the older people. After the project, the students were much more interested in older people; in a nice respectful way. They were much more interested in helping people who don’t have homes. They were also very mindful of how easy they have it compared to the older generation. We were asking what chores the residents had to do and realised how little they to do by comparison.”

- **Community members.** St. Cecilia’s College second year project including a structure of community stakeholders and volunteers supporting each class.
- **Primary schools.** Blessed Trinity involved two feeder Primaries in the project. Belfast Model For Boys strengthened relationships with its feeder primary school: students displayed their exhibition in the school and presented an assembly to encourage primary pupils to responsibility and playing their part in taking care of their environment.
- **Universities.** At Blessed Trinity College undergraduate students from Queen’s University, Belfast taught on the drama workshops.
- **Arts organisations.** Malone Integrated College’s year 2 project plans to exhibit students’ work at the Ulster Museum. Mercy College developed a relationship with the Duncairn Centre, which included joint events.

- **Urban Villages.** Urban Villages helped organise St. Colm's High School students' work to be displayed on the hoardings for Colin Park. Teachers and pupils from the school attended the launch of the new Colin Transport Hub in March 2020. At the event, pupils from St Colm's recited their poetry which was composed on their perceptions of mental health and on positive strategies for improving mental health such as the use of outdoor spaces.
- **Businesses.** St Joseph Boys School's first year project included interviewing local businesses, a higher percentage of whom were past pupils. "It gave an idea that we are not a wee speck in Derry."

The Head of St Joseph's Boys School said The Creative Schools Partnership project was more impactful than the school could have anticipated: it improved the participants' literacy and academic performance; it increased their confidence and gave them the assurance that they could stand up and speak in front of a group; it also raised the profile of the school in the community. "The boys were everywhere in the community. The project was fantastic for community relations. The participants now have a different standing in the school. Other years are looking up to them."

These connections embedded the students more positively in society, but also benefitted the organisations with which the schools worked and the community in general. Interviewees mentioned these **mechanisms that support social cohesion and regeneration**. The programme:

- Raised participants' aspirations and created images or experiences that inspired other students and in some cases families.
- Raised the status of the arts with this group of students and so gave students interested in creative careers a greater feeling that they had a place in the school and community.
- Communicated creative values around originality that embody respect for individuality and difference.
- Implied a complex view of place that allows for pride in history and community, combined with an openness to new ideas and horizons.
- Gave students the experience of, and interest in, travelling outside their communities.
- Gave students the confidence and independent thought to question the prejudices of their parents.
- Helped engage all students in learning and so reduced feelings of disadvantage.
- Showed children that there were enjoyable and rewarding jobs in creative fields that they could find or develop for themselves.
- Brought students and families from different backgrounds together in a positive and bonding experience that went beyond religion.
- Helped create cohesion across newly integrated schools.

- Gave parents positive experiences of schools that might override negative associations from their own schooling.
- Strengthened the link between students and teachers so that the students were more willing to accept help and had someone to talk to if they had problems.
- Made the schools more visible in the local community.
- Gave arts organisations and businesses a route to recruit future volunteers or employees.
- Created long-term relationships, especially with care homes.
- Developed a more positive image of young people and their role in society.

Some projects were explicitly focused on issues around sectarianism. For example, Mercy College's first year show had the message that the students didn't want to be a generation that holds onto bitterness or hatred. The second scene in the final performance depicted sectarian name-calling and had the lines: "It is our whole community's problem. We need to accept each other."

CONCLUSION

CREATING THE CONTEXT FOR IMPACT

The programme has almost a year left to run, so its full value cannot yet be judged. However, this report demonstrates the programme has already had a strong impact on students, teachers, schools and the community. There is a strong case for the programme to be continued and ideally expanded to a wider range of secondary schools. This expansion could be through including more schools but should also be through involving schools in spreading the word about the programme, for example, through a conference and/or championing process (where each school supports one or two other schools to adopt creative learning). All of this work should be based in a deep understanding of the purpose of the Creative Schools Partnership Programme, which is not just as a set of arts projects but as a programme of organisational development and change around creative learning.

It is important that the next stage of the programme is set up to maximise impact. These good practice principles are derived from my work evaluating creative schools projects for twenty years, including my book that places creative schools projects and participative practice at the heart of new audience development². This section applies mainly to dedicated arts projects. However, some also apply to the wider aim of using creative approaches across the curriculum, which can be seen as a second stage in harnessing the arts for the benefit of students' learning and wellbeing.

HAVE FOCUSED OBJECTIVES FOR EACH PROJECT LINKED TO THE SCHOOL'S STRATEGY

The arts are powerful. Having an eye on high-level important objectives avoids the potential risk of trivialising or dissipating the potential impact of arts engagement. Having precise objectives gives a clear guide to selecting the right artform, each of which has a slightly different flavour and potential.

HAVE A PROJECT MANAGER WORKING FOUR DAYS A WEEK

A skilled project manager will make an important contribution to the quality and impact of creative schools programmes. They will encourage applications from schools most in need of the arts – often those most lacking in capacity. They will help match schools to artists who suit their needs and style of working. They will provide advice on planning and good practice in arts projects. They will support and facilitate evaluation. They will provide a common thread between projects. Some of this support is practical, and some pastoral, helping teachers to continue when they are already over-stretched. The four days a week is specified because of the potential benefit an arts specialist can give to a programme like this and also because of the need for responsiveness: replying within a day not a week.

² <https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/imagining-arts-organizations-for-new-audiences/>

EMPLOY PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS

One of the unintended positive consequences of the weakening of arts teaching in schools is the opportunities that arise for working with professional artists and arts organisations. Employing professional artists who are also skilled facilitators is one of the best ways of ensuring quality in the project. Professional artists have much to contribute to the students: they usually model forms of openness and experimentation, often with a very strong intellectual or conceptual basis that those unfamiliar with the arts might find surprising; they make a link to the world of work – or even of celebrity - that is motivating for pupils; and they can often pass on detailed practical advice that helps teachers in their practice.

CHOOSE TARGETED GROUP OF STUDENTS

Schools often want to spread the benefit across a whole year group in order to achieve equity. While this is an understandable aim, impact is likely to be higher if the school chooses individuals based on their relationship to the identified strategic objective.

HAVE A SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT

This principle underpins the previous one. Having four groups of children each attend one workshop is likely to have lower impact than having one group of children attend four workshops. Building students' ownership of the process and product – which I would see as a route to greater impact - takes time. Developing skill takes time, it requires trial and error. Building relationships between artists and students, and between students themselves, takes time. Building a habit of attending a theatre or gallery takes time.

HAVE MULTIPLE CONTACTS IN THE SCHOOL INCLUDING THE PRINCIPAL

If sustainability is one of the indicators of success in creative schools programmes, and I believe it is, then projects need to have multiple roots in the school if they are to flourish in the long term.

HAVE AN EXTERNAL EVALUATOR APPOINTED FROM THE START

Evaluation can help to clarify objectives, identify hidden assumptions, create customised ways of measuring outcomes, structure and capture learning, and document the process and outcomes. Evaluators need to be appointed from the start so that schools know what will be expected from them and have a structure for reflection.

LINK TO ARTS VENUES

One of the themes of my book is that participative practice can build skills, connections and emotions that pave the way for arts engagement.

“Learning about the arts in childhood is correlated with, and assumed to predict, future arts attendance.³ Without this foundation, people are less equipped to have a meaningful experience of the arts, despite the best endeavors of arts organizations.” Imagining Arts Organizations⁴

INVOLVE PARENTS

There are many reasons to involve parents in creative learning programmes. Creative projects provide a positive and celebratory way of talking to parents about their child’s accomplishments - an opportunity that might be rare for non-academic or disengaged students, an opportunity that might be particularly heart-felt because of the personal nature of creativity for the children, the extent to which they put themselves into the work. Helping parents to become invested in their child’s education is, of course, one of the proven ways of helping children’s education. Helping parents to become interested in the arts is one of the rare routes to drawing non-attenders into the arts as part of new audience development. This is too good an opportunity to miss.

HAVE TEACHERS IN THE SESSIONS AS EQUAL PARTNERS

The relationship with teachers is important to: embeds skills more deeply in the school, to ensure that the project is customised to the needs of the school, to model the collaborative nature of the creative process – which is one of its most unique aspects - and to restore the status of teachers as artist in their own right.

BRING SCHOOLS TOGETHER

Where schools have designed projects around a common theme, bringing teachers and students together - or even creating a combined or collaged artwork - showcases the wide vista of creativity. Where schools have carried out projects at the same time, bringing teachers together can help to build knowledge and momentum. Bringing schools who have participated in a programme together with those who have yet to participate or express an interest to participate can help to create a ripple effect of awareness and interest.

THINK REFLEXIVELY

Reflexivity is the important concept of bi-directional or mutually beneficial relationships. I use this principle to suggest that creative schools programmes should not be interventions that are directed only at students’ learning. All stakeholders – funders, principals, teachers, and artists - should have time in the programme to reflect on the meaning of the project for their practice and thinking.

³ There are many sources for this claim, but see the analysis of Novak-Leonard and Brown (2011) for National Endowment for the Arts; and Zakaras and Lowell (2008) for The Wallace Foundation.

⁴ <https://www.phf.org.uk/publications/imagining-arts-organizations-for-new-audiences/>

MAXIMISE LEGACY

This principle underpins and brings together all the other principles. Action taken during the project can give deliberateness to legacy. Maximising legacy can include:

- Discussing the project with or showcasing the results to other teachers, especially those teaching non-arts subjects.
- Discussing the project with or showcasing the results to other students, especially those who might not consider themselves artistic.
- Creating teaching resources and making them accessible e.g. online, to reduce the time for other teachers to develop similar projects.
- Creating a permanent artwork and displaying it in the school.
- Using the artwork as part of the school's communication or identity, for example, in a prominent position on its website, or as a logo for an area of work.
- Commissioning and publishing an evaluation report, especially one that gives guidelines for other projects.
- Identifying future journeys for participants, which might include career visits or advice, after school clubs, follow on projects (especially those where participants progress to becoming mentors to a new intake), youth fora for venues, or support so that students can organise their own visits to venues.
- Inviting policy-makers and other decision-makers to observe key moments in the process so that they can see for themselves the power of the arts.

THE VALUE OF A LONG TERM PROGRAMME

The evaluations so far give strong evidence of the need for a three to five year programme. Benefits include:

- **Developing relationships with artists.** It is important to understand that students, especially those with traumatic experiences, take time to develop trust. Several of the schools retained the same artists from one year to the next and this gave a strong impact in terms of mutual understanding and impact on the school.

For example, Ashfield Girls High School employed the same artists and the teacher noted that: "The open atmosphere, pupil engagement and interest, air of relaxed confidence and openness is clearly a legacy of last year's project. No one appeared shy or withdrawn."

- **Applying learning from one year to the next.** Projects often built on interests expressed by students in previous years, or produced products that were complementary.

For example, St Joseph's Boys School's pilot project created a character called Joe to represent students at the school. The second year took the idea further by using the term for alumni to self-identify. The outcomes from the project included a display of former pupils

(Joes) and a professional quality film of men with different jobs saying “I am a Joe,” in a way that communicated pride in the school.

- **Giving progression routes for students.** Students from one year can help deliver the next year’s project.

For example, in St Joseph’s Boys School’s some of the students from the pilot year acted as mentors to the younger boys, including managing the filming shoots and acting as an editorial committee.

If, as happened in this programme, the next stage is limited to a small number of Urban Village schools, then the processes should reflect this structure. In particular, it is important that the application process is for the whole period – rather than having annual application processes. This would reduce repetition in the administration and would focus attention, where it should be, on building long-term relationships with the schools.

THE DIFFERENT CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ARTFORMS

As well as understanding the special contributions of the arts, a future programme needs to understand the full range of choices and experiences available from different artforms. I will give three examples:

FORUM THEATRE

In the pilot year, Mercy College used Forum Theatre.

Drama is special because:

- Performing can bring out the quiet children.
- Drama is thinking expressively – including dance, song and visual arts.
- Getting in character gives transferable skills in analysing texts.

“One of the assumptions of Forum Theatre is that human beings think with their entire body and the entire body has to be involved in the search for alternatives to the unresolved conflicts the audience is experiencing.” Angelo Miramonti, *How to Use Forum Theatre for Community Dialogue 2017*

Forum Theatre is special because:

- The intergenerational research gave a framework for children to talk to their parents about deep issues and to compare their lives with those of their parents.
- The structure is inclusive and participatory: rooted in the students’ experiences and preferences.
- Students grew from being asked repeatedly ‘what is your view? What do you want?’

- Talking in the second person allowed children to say things they wouldn't feel able to say personally.

“You get to talk as the character. You can say what you want without being judged because it is your character saying it. You can say things that you might not be brave enough to speak out. You can be open and talk about how suicide affects families You get to see different sides. You get to see the families and how they are affected. You get to see the person.”
Teacher

- The narrative gains power from connections to real experience.
- The structure of continually refining and questioning the pieces exposes values underpinning society and creates a multi-layered narrative. It also gave a fast pace to each session.
- The structure helps teachers feel more comfortable teaching creativity: it gives a framework for them to take risks safely.
- Playing different characters allowed students to try out different identities, to look at the risks and consider the consequences of actions, and so reflect on what would form a good choice.

“Through drama you can ‘fake it until you make it’; you can put on this persona and see how it feels.” Teacher

- Students who are quiet or shy have their time in the light and their peers start to see them differently and understand that they too want to have a voice.
- The open and non-judgemental nature of the process created a sense of group unity and trust.

“You can always rely on drama to bring a group together.” Teacher

- Students have an understanding and a sense of ownership over the drama piece. The intention is for this feeling to extend to students' families, as their word and images, and local street names, appeared in the piece.
- The debrief process encourages students to consider different perspectives and to see behaviour as active rather than passive, as embodying choice.

“Asking students to put themselves in the role of being the oppressor, being the bully or the person shoplifting encourages them to reflect on their own behaviour.” Artist

CLAY

In its pilot and first year, St. Vincent's Centre introduced pottery making. Clay is special because:

- It is a form of touch without touch, which might be important for traumatised children who dislike being touched.
- It is possible that this stroking effect soothes nerve endings. Certainly, I observed children were fidgeting during the interviews and it is possible that clay-making redirects this energy.
- Clay is a very flexible medium, malleable in three dimensions. It supports free creativity.
- Clay changes in the hands, becoming warm and soft. It is very forgiving and allows the participant to make and remake.
- It is messy, which is an attraction for students who are often reined in.
- Clay has a cultural and symbolic value: it is mentioned in the bible and makes a link to the earth. It is also a way of escaping from a world defined by technology.
- Clay is a common/non precious material, which reinforces a sense of creativity as being easily accessible.
- Clay-making requires intense concentration, which gives people a distraction from worries or cares.
- Some techniques of clay-making are rhythmic, which again might have a relaxing effect.
- Clay-making requires physical proximity. The artist guides the student by placing her hands over theirs.
- Clay-making strengthens visualisation skills because glazing changes colour during the firing process, so the user has to apply one colour in order to create another.

“Deliberately working with clay stimulates the rich interaction of limbic, cortical and bodily sensorial pathways, permitting access to implicit emotional memories.” Art Therapy and the Neuroscience of Relationships, Creativity and Resilience, Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology, Noah Hass-Cohen and Joanne Clyde Findlay, 2015

- Many of the students are kinaesthetic learners and the artform suited their learning style well.
- One of the students said he thought about the clay sessions when he wanted to calm himself down.
- The core group all increased their behavioural scores during the time they participated in the project. In one case the improvement was remarkable.

MIXED MEDIA DRAWING/PRINTING

In its pilot year, Belfast Model For Girls worked with a mixed media artist: Mixed media is special because:

- It encourages a playful, experimental approach.
- It epitomises choice and flexibility.

- It diverts attention from a focus on material to a perspective of art as a way of seeing and thinking. The artist employed exercises that accentuated these skills, for example, blind drawing (not looking at what you are drawing) and drawing upside down.
- It challenges the assumption of students who think they are not good at art because they cannot draw.
- It allows children with special needs to take part on a level because they are not trying to match something on the board.
- Using charcoal and natural materials makes a link to the subject of many of the images (trees).
- It suits kinaesthetic learners.
- It gives an element of surprise that increases the excitement.
- It gives a broader range of possibilities for each child to find their special talent.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE ARTS AND WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

What is special about the arts? In 2009, I produced a Theory of the Social Impact of the Arts based on Self Determination Theory. This argues that the three Basic Psychological Needs - Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness – are exceptionally well served through artistic activity because of its unique combination of sensory, emotional and cognitive participation.

Summarising the many mechanisms mentioned in my three Creative School Partnership evaluation reports, we can see that:

- **The arts have a special ability to engage students because of the vividness of sense-based and emotional approaches, which provide more relaxing, varied, vivid and memorable contexts for learning, and visible products that extend pride and engagement.** Students learn that persevering can increase their satisfaction and transfer this understanding, as well as the positive emotions from participating in the arts project, to other subjects and the school.
- **Artists bring powerful ways of working that are non-judgemental but also highly aspirational, explicit about process but also open to improvisation, respectful of the individual but also collaborative in a profound and highly personal way.** Some of these approaches can be learnt and applied by teachers.
- **Project-based approaches have benefits because of the small group size, feeling of being special, student's satisfaction from seeing the process through, greater initiative and collaboration, all of which strengthen students' abilities and desire to be self-directing in their learning.** Arts projects are especially powerful because of the meaningful nature of the process and social context of the product, but other project-based approaches will also have some of these benefits.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS RETURNING FROM LOCKDOWN

When schools return from the lockdown, they will face special challenges because of the mental health problems of students, disparities in the quality of home learning, and loss of learning habits. The arts have a potentially valuable role in supporting schools with each of these challenges. It is important that the rethink after the lockdown is used to embed creative learning rather than dismiss it in some supposed focus on 'core subjects'.

APPENDIX ONE: BACKGROUND ON SCHOOLS AND PROJECTS

MERCY COLLEGE

Post code	Belfast BT14 7QR		
	Pilot	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments	450	556	
% of students who receive free school meals	70%	68%	
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	222	263	
Religion	98% Catholic	94% Catholic, 3% Protestant	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	D'Ya get me - using drama to explore issues affecting traumatised communities past and present, watching and creating drama	Putting on a Face – using drama, poetry, music and visual art to explore identity and mental and physical wellbeing.	Mercy Moments – exploring the history of Mercy College and its impact on students and the wider community, as a haven for pupils throughout the Troubles.
Artists and partners	Patricia Meir, retired Drama teacher Syd Trotter, Tutor Ulster University Dr Rosemary Moreland, Senior Lecturer in Youth and Community Studies, Ulster University	Patricia Meir, retired Drama teacher Maebh Meir, visual artist Fleur Mellor, dancer Duncairn Centre Theatre trip to the Grand Opera House, career trip to the Lyric Theatre	Nerve Belfast
Timing	March to May 2018	March to June 2019	
Age of children	14	11	
Number of children	20	18	

ST JOSEPH BOYS SCHOOL

Post code	Derry BT48 9NX		
	Pilot	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments	720	677	
% of students who receive free school meals	66%	66%	

Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	316	345	
Religion	99% Catholic	99% Catholic	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	Teenage Kicks – developing literacy through creating and producing own magazine	Becoming Joe – film and e-book on the life of year 8s	A Week With Joe - mental health and wellbeing
Artists and partners	Leona O Neill, writer and journalist Jim McCafferty, photographer	Fionnuala Deane, John McDaid, Dog Ears John Peto, Sharon Tosh, Nerve Centre	Leona O’Neill , Freelance Journalist Irish News Fiona Flynn, Verbal Art Centre Paul Sandy, Nerve Centre Bogside Bradywell Health Forum
Timing	February to June 2018	April to June 2019	
Age of children	12	11	
Number of children	22	28 Year 8s and 5 Year 13s and 14s	

ST. VINCENT’S CENTRE

Post code	BT6 8HN		
	Pilot	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments	658: overall college/30	676: overall college/30	
% of students who receive free school meals	100%	100%	
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	185: overall college/30	207: overall college/30	
Religion	78% Catholic, 3% Protestant: overall college	76% Catholic, 4% Protestant: overall college	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	Artist’s residency	A Day in the Life of St Vincents/A Day in Our shoes -	Cause and Consequence, Exploring Emotion
Artists and partners	Annmarie Robinson, ceramic artist	Annmarie Robinson, ceramic artist Kwame Daniels, Julien Raux, Bounce Culture N.I.	Annmarie Robinson, ceramic artist Kwame Daniels, Julien Raux, Bounce Culture N.I.
Timing	March to July 2018	March to September	
Age of children	11-14	11-16	
Number of children	10-18	15	

ST. CECILIA'S COLLEGE

Post code	Derry BT48 9PJ		
	Pilot	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments	797	806	
% of students who receive free school meals	63%	61%	
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	154	189	
Religion	99% Catholic	99% Catholic	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	Creative workshops and films about mental health	Let's Talk, Conversation 2 – writing and film making	Make Derry A Healthier, Happier and More Prosperous Place To Live
Artists and partners	Bounce Culture NI	Bounce Culture NI	City Smarts, Bounce
Timing	March to June 2018	May to June 2019	
Age of children	11	13-14	11-12
Number of children	24	19	137

ASHFIELD GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL

Post code	Belfast BT4 2LY		
	Pilot	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments	691	699	
% of students who receive free school meals	45%	44%	
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	267	285	
Religion	67% Protestant, 5% Catholic, 27% Other	67% Protestant, 6% Catholic, 27% Other	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	Self Esteem Succeeds - creation of music video	Mind Readers – creative journaling and exploring the science of screen time	Ashfield Ukuladies
Artists and partners	Accidental Theatre Company	Residential at Kilcronaghan Visit to MED-Lab Author, Sheena Wilkinson Science Communicator, Emer Maguire	Author, Sheena Wilkinson Science Communicator, Emer Maguire
Timing	May to July 2018	May to June 2019	
Age of children	13	11-12	12-13

Number of children	18	24 (also 3 reading buddies from the 6 th form, who also helped with cooking on the residential)	24
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ASHFIELD BOYS HIGH SCHOOL

Post code	Belfast BT4 2LY
Total enrolments	740
% of students who receive free school meals	44%
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	269
Religion	77% Protestant, 2% Catholic, 21% Other
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	Write Down Our Street, a story writing journey, story-telling supported by trained volunteer mentors
Artists and partners	Fighting Words Belfast Visit to CS Lewis Trail and The Wee tram
Timing	April to June 2018
Age of children	11-14
Number of children	16

BELFAST MODEL FOR GIRLS

Post code	Belfast BT14 6NQ		
	Pilot	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments	946	983	
% of students who receive free school meals	61%	61%	
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	352	341	
Religion	89% Protestant, 1% Catholic, 10% Other	88% Protestant, 1% Catholic, 11% Other	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	Landscapes - explored students' physical and metaphorical landscapes	Home/Shelter – explored past ways of living and feelings about home for students, their parents, and groups in the community	Portraiture
Artists and partners	Anushiya Sundaralingam, visual artist Visits to Clotworthy House, Antrim Castle Gardens, Ulster Museum, the Huge Lane Gallery and the	Anushiya Sundaralingam, visual artist Michelle Young, theatre practitioner Visits to the Folk Museum, Lyric Theatre,	Anushiya Sundaralingam, visual artist

	National Gallery in Dublin		
Timing	March to September 2018	April to June 2019	
Age of children	12-13	11-12	13-14
Number of children	50	17	

BLESSED TRINITY COLLEGE

Post code	Belfast Bt15 4DZ		
	Pilot	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments	1271	1239	
% of students who receive free school meals	60%	58%	
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	622	659	
Religion	96% Catholic, 1% Protestant, 3% Other	95% Catholic, 0% Protestant, 5% Other	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	Creative Learning Project Story-telling, film and video	Colours of the Mind – students exploring their emotional and personal relationship with colour through print making	The Identities Project – students working with the older generation from the Newington Day Care Centre to research local history and presents their stories using film and music.
Artists and partners	Fighting Words Belfast and the Nerve Centre Trips to the Titanic Belfast, Ulster American Folk Park and Newington Day Care Centre	The Nerve Centre Belfast Print Workshop Newington Day Care Centre	Bounce Culture Queen's University Drama Department Newington Day Care Centre
Timing	March to May 2018	March to June 2019	November to May 2020
Age of children	13	14	13
Number of children	15	15	16

MALONE INTEGRATED COLLEGE

Post code	Belfast BT10 0JB		
	Pilot	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments	485	508	
% of students who receive free school meals	69%	66%	

Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	196	136	
Religion	51% Protestant, 27% Catholic, 22% Other	48% Protestant, 28% Catholic, 24% Other	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	Creating a large-scale artwork for the entrance hall of the school celebrating diversity	Mental Health Affects Us All: Race Colour Creed – using practical workshops to address mental health	We Are All Equal
Artists and partners	Trevor Woods, ceramic artist Brendan McKinley, sculptor Nerve Belfast	Claudia Greene, Graphic Designer Nerve Centre Bill Penney, Associate Lecturer in fine art print, UU Belfast Campus Belfast South Community Resource	Niall Carlin, film maker Jim Doyle, author William Simpson, storyboard artist Revised visual artist: Sharron Currie
Timing	April to June 2018	April to June 2019	March to June 2020
Age of children	13	13	12-13
Number of children	15	14	20

ST. COLM'S HIGH SCHOOL

Post code	Belfast BT17 0BT		
	Pilot	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolment	366	430	
% of students who receive free school meals	72%	?	
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs	359	363	
Religion	No data	No data	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project	Production of an online cookbook	Ceramic Exterior Wall Mural/Development of Literature Through Poetry	Embracing Positive Mental Health
Artists and partners	Dolan Heaney, chef Colin MCguiver, Sheena Kelly Wheel Works	Annamarie Robinson, ceramic artist Gina McDonald, Caoimhe McGrath, CNP	Kwa Daniels, Bounce Culture Young at Art Jan Carson, writer
Timing	April to June 2018	March to June 2019	
Age of children	13-14	11-12	
Number of children	10	100	

ST GENEVIEVE'S HIGH SCHOOL

Post code			
	Pilot: NA	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments		1047	
% of students who receive free school meals		55%	
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs		242	
Religion		98% Catholic	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project		Only the Lonely – tackling loneliness in the elderly through dance and make up	Only the Lonely
Artists and partners		Oonagh Boman, make-up artist	Oonagh Booman, Jo Woosely, Connie McGrath make-up artists Mags Byrne DU Dance Alan Clarke, Clarke School of Dancing The Nerve Centre Into Film Patricia Brown – Film and Theatre Wigs and Make up
Timing		April to June 2019	
Age of children		13-14	13-14
Number of children		18 plus the wider group	25

BELFAST MODEL FOR BOYS

Post code			
	Pilot: NA	Yr 1	Yr 2
Total enrolments		1047	
% of students who receive free school meals		60%	
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs		483	
Religion		90% Protestant, 1% Catholic, 9% Other	
Creative Schools Partnerships Project		Postcards from Cavehill –	Facing the Future - public art/sculpture

		photographic exhibitions	
Artists and partners		Melvyn Smith, Community Engagement Manager, Belfast Exposed Grainne McKenna, The Learning Curve	Alan Cargo, The Foundry at Millfield College Eleanor Wheeler
Timing		April to June 2019	
Age of children		13-14 and 16-17	
Number of children		30	

LISNEAL COLLEGE

Post code			
	NA	NA	Yr 2
Total enrolments			
% of students who receive free school meals			
Number of pupils with Special Educational Needs			
Religion			
Creative Schools Partnerships Project			
Artists and partners			Jonathan Burgess, writer and producer Codie Morrison, Blue Eagle Productions Gary McFeeley, Camera operator, New Gate Arts
Timing			
Age of children			11-14
Number of children			