



WARWICK ARTS CENTRE

Evaluation of the Arts
Active Network Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five schools worked with Warwick Arts Centre and a number of Creative Practitioners in the theatre, visual and other performing Arts over a period of two years.

Practitioners visited schools regularly to develop the Arts in children. Pupils were involved in writing poetry, performing drama, dance and the creation of visual arts exhibits such as 'light-boxes' and wooden images cut with lasers.

At the end of the two-year period, and almost entirely managed by children, a Festival of Arts was created in July 2017. A Festival Management Group of children from each of the five schools took charge of the organisation, although the Warwick Arts Centre facilitated much, in terms of the logistics.

This reports considers:

- The project
- Working with creative practitioners
- Previous involvement of the schools in the Arts
- The Festival Management Group
- The Children's learning
- The development of teachers
- The Future
- The top five things for a successful Arts project

Conclusions are summarized according to the key evaluation questions:

What are the benefits & impact of a network of:

a) school communities working & learning together?

- This develops community cohesion;
- Schools with less of a tradition of a creative arts curriculum can learn from those with more experience;
- It helps to develop the cultural and educational capital of a community.

b) putting children in the creative driving seat & of school communities working with professional artists /arts organisations?

- Children learn in different ways when they are empowered to take ownership of their learning;
- This has a powerful impact on the quality of learning as well as a positive impact on learning outcomes. There is evidence that children surprised their teachers by going far beyond any learning, that their schools could have anticipated;
- The Creative Practitioners provided children with different experiences, different ways of learning, much more organic and less 'objectives-led'. This led to greater empowerment in the children and a more organic approach in teachers who embraced this approach.

c) community/school relationships & on relationships between schools & the arts sector?

- Practitioners explained the importance of breaking down barriers to engagement with the Arts, through Arts projects like this;

- One school realised that the Warwick Arts Centre was a bus ride away from school. Going there sowed the seed of future experiences for the children and their families.

What are the examples of good practise used in this project that can be shared more widely to inform our future work and that of other arts organisations?

a) How do we best facilitate teacher, child and 'artist/ organisation' to work collaboratively?

- Setting up the longitudinal project with an initial experience at the local Arts centre is vital to the start of the process;
- Linking a confident creative practitioner who is experienced in working with schools helps to facilitate the Arts project.

b) How do young people and teachers learn skills together in a shared creative environment?

- Weekly contact with the practitioner and regular meetings between them and the teachers, helps to properly contextualise and embed a creative approach to the curriculum;
- Providing creative experiences for teachers is as important as those for children, if teachers are eventually to be able to model the creative process.

c) How does the balance of control and power in teachers and young people, influence project outcomes?

- Practitioners focused on the creative process, in a more organic approach to learning;
- Developing a more organic approach to the school curriculum helps to embed creative Arts in school and to give children a voice in their learning in a way that the traditional school curriculum does not always offer.

d) How can this project be sustained over a longer period?

- Bringing together schools, creative practitioners and Warwick Arts Centre is the way forward;
- Warwick Arts Centre is critical in facilitating this process;
- If Warwick Arts Centre is not able to directly bid for funding schools collectively or individually could bid for funding, but we would recommend that they build in some resources to enable the involvement of Warwick Arts Centre

OUTLINE OF PROJECT

Aims

1. To establish a network of schools from the CV31 area into an Arts Active Network, working with a minimum of 5 schools in 2015 – 2017, who will mount the first South Leamington Arts Festival in July 2017.
2. To provide appropriate artistic engagements with professional companies and professional artists for young people, teachers & school communities to build the skills and experience required to plan, develop, perform at and execute an Arts Festival.
3. To put children in the creative driving seat through participation in see, make, share activities and through the festival management group.
4. To improve confidence, self-esteem, behaviour, team working especially through the development of social, emotional, intellectual and artistic skills.
5. To increase funding for this project after July 2017, or possibly to expand it out to new areas.

Research evaluation questions

1. What are the benefits & impact of a network of:
 - school communities working & learning together?
 - putting children in the creative driving seat & of school communities working with professional artists /arts organisations?
 - community/school relationships & on relationships between schools & the arts sector?
2. What are the examples of good practise used in this project that can be shared more widely to inform our future work, that of other arts organisations?

Specifically:

- a. How do we best facilitate teacher, child and 'artist/ organisation' to work collaboratively?
 - b. How do young people and teachers learn skills together in a shared creative environment?
 - c. How does the balance of control and power influence in teachers and young people influence project outcomes?
3. How can this project be sustained over a longer period?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Following the evaluation of creative initiatives in schools by Mclellon, Galton & Page (2015), the evaluation will take the form of a qualitative analysis of case studies in five schools.

Schools

There are four Community primary schools and a Catholic primary school in this community arts project. The five schools are all situated within about 3 miles of each other. For the purposes of this project four of the schools had continued the work of two years ago, by which a creative practitioner had visited the school to develop a creative arts project with and by children. Four of the schools had worked on this Arts Connect and Warwick District Council funded project in 2015-16. One school only joined the second year of the project which involved a range of theatre, visual arts and dancers visiting a school to develop skills in the children through creative activities. At the end of the second year of the project, the children along with the creative practitioners organised a Festival to share performances, experiences and the outcomes of the project.

Data Collection

In each of the five schools, data was collected as follows, at two points (during arts development activities and post-festival). The first set of interviews took place between March and June 2017 and the final interviews took place immediately after the Arts Festival in July 2017.

Interviewed were semi-structured with questions constructed in line with the main research questions. These were partly suggested by the Warwick Arts Centre, but focused largely on:

- the nature of the pupil learning in the project,
- how the teachers engaged with the project,
- effective working arrangements between teachers and creative practitioners,
- the sustainability of the project.

School	Interview of Link teacher	Interview of link 'practitioner'	Interview of focus group of children	Broad transcription	Thematic Analysis
C----- Community Primary School	2 x 30 mins	1 x 30 mins	2 x 30 mins	Yes	Yes
K----- Community Primary School	2 x 30 mins	1 x 30 mins	2 x 30 mins	Yes	Yes
P----- Primary School	2 x 30 mins	1 x 30 mins	2 x 30 mins	Yes	Yes
S----- Community Primary School	1 x 30 mins	1 x 30 mins	1 x 30 mins	Yes	Yes
Si----- Primary School	2 x 30 mins	1 x 30 mins	2 x 30 mins	Yes	Yes
Total number of interviews	9	4	9		

Data recording and analysis

Interviews were carried out by a research assistant under the supervision of an experienced level 7/8 academic researcher. Each interview was recording using a Dictaphone. These lasted about 30-50 mins, with children being interviewed in small groups and teachers being interviewed on their own. Creative practitioners were either interviewed on the phone or face to face. A broad transcription was made of each interview by a professional transcriber. Subsequently, a thematic analysis was made to identify key points of interest.

Ethics

Ethics approval was obtained through the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. This involved submitting a request for ethics approval, research consent forms, research information sheets and draft research interview questions. Written approval to commence the research was given early in 2017. No particular challenges presented themselves before or during the research in term of ethics. Consent forms were collected from pupils and teachers in line with the framework outlined in the ethics request.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The analysis is organised thematically, largely following the structure of the semi-structured interviews. Whilst individual schools, pupils and practitioners are not identified, any quotes will be credited. To summarise it would be worth recognizing some key features of the arts project. For instance, one creative practitioner suggests that this experience supports teachers in helping them to understand that ‘a lack of control is a good thing’ during a creative process. Likewise, another child has enjoyed playing the drama games as ‘everyone gets a chance to be who they want’.

The project

In the two-year timetable for each school, there was for most children, an introduction to the project and attending a performance or exhibition at Warwick Arts Centre. This then provided the children with an experience of the arts: performance, dance, visual arts and sculpture. This could be challenging. For instance, in one performance of Macbeth, a teacher said that “after half an hour she was wondering what on earth she’d done, because four children were in tears, one screaming, saying he wanted to leave and she was thinking it was quite gory, but the turning point was actually when it finished, the actor went backstage, showered, came back in jeans and a tee-shirt, sat down and talked to the kids and those same children who had been crying were absolutely hooked and how did you do that, how did you do that bit and that experience to talk to them, actually, I think made it the best experience they had.”

Another teacher said that “every class, either went to the theatre at Warwick Arts Centre or in the case of Year 2, they went and saw a colour trail and sculpture trail at the Arts Centre and Year 1, and Early Years actually, had a performance that came to the school and it was performed in the hall here, so they’ve all experienced the Arts.”

In the follow up to the Warwick Arts Centre visit, the creative practitioners then visited the school to follow up with activities over a protracted sequence. Generally, at least once a fortnight, identified classes gained some insight into the creative process. For part of the second year, the original schools took on the creative lead with their classes, by watching a performance at Warwick Arts Centre and then creating a response to it back in school, without the support of a creative practitioner. This work was shared with all the other schools, in a joint performance. For instance, following the Macbeth performance, a ‘Role on the Wall’ activity led to children writing letters to the family from Macduff of what he wished he could say to them. The teacher said that ‘It was really beautiful because they’d imagined it, they’d thought about it and they’d live for those moments, so that then they were able to write really beautiful letters’. From the children’s point of view there was a mantra, emphasised by the practitioner ‘Be ourselves, but not too chaotic and just getting together and doing the play’

The children took control of planning a Festival to share and celebrate the Arts activities they had been involved in. This was managed by children in a Festival Management Group. In each school, children took on roles linked to the festival: for instance, box office for tickets, financial, marketing and so on. Both teachers and practitioners recognised that this was a culmination of the creative project.

‘They had a sense of empowerment because they were the centre and they were choosing what they wanted to do’. The Creative Practitioner identifies that children could be free within the project due to the structures in place at school. This was often contrasted with the formal curriculum: this and creative learning are ‘actually working together’, according to one practitioner.

At the Festival, there were professional performances during the day. Feedback from pupils, teachers and practitioners is that there was a balance between practitioner and pupil performance on the day of the Festival in line with the wishes of the children. Likewise of the theatre, dance and art performances, all participating schools were represented. There wasn't just one dominating play.

Working with creative practitioners

Teachers and pupils were generally very enthusiastic about working with the Creative Practitioners. This worked best when:

- Practitioners could help pupils and teachers relate to a range of creative skills and experiences. These were sometimes quite challenging, but still they were made to be relevant for those in school. One group of children said of the practitioner: 'She could be strict when she needed to be'
- Creative practitioners had the confidence and experience to help children and staff to be flexibly-minded, employing different pedagogical approaches to 'go with the flow' and not to be too 'objectives-led';

Creative Practitioners felt that the teachers learnt from the experiences that it can be good to 'stand back and let people find their own solutions rather than teach them totally how to do something'. The main role of a Creative Practitioner within the project is to model the creative process so that it can be replicated by teachers. Practitioners suggested this approach could be improved with further Teacher development in creativity. "It could be a session where materials are left on a table and teachers are encouraged to create something. You're putting the teachers then back into thinking like children'.

Teachers identified several factors which they believed contributed to the success of the project, particularly in the phase of activities in school:

Regular meetings: this involved pupils from the management committee meeting with others from schools fairly regularly to discuss the planning and preparation of the Festival. Teachers and Warwick Arts Centre Creative Learning staff were part of this group. Warwick Arts Centre staff and associates were particularly crucial in keeping the children and the project on track. One practitioner said, "It was good to talk with the teachers after the sessions to evaluate what had worked well and to plan the next steps. It also enabled the teachers to find out what was going on in the other class and kept them involved in the project;

Communication: as the school-based activities played out through the year, practitioners and teachers regularly discussed activities in advance of sessions. Practitioners saw this as being critical for developing depth and quality in the classroom-based activities. "Making it clear that the teachers should be involved in the project by keeping them informed and providing opportunities for them to participate. It was good to get the project integrated within lesson and with the school 'rather than just something added on."

Consistency: having a consistent member of staff and in a school with the capacity for staff release, was a major factor for supporting the school and Festival outcomes. In some schools, this was a Teaching Assistant, in others it was a teacher. As the creative practitioners said the most important thing was that teachers were flexible and open-minded;

Funding: even a small amount of funding was seen by teachers as having an exponential impact: for instance one school said that they had been able to use a range of papers and art materials in a way that they would not have been able to but for the funding made available outside of the project:

Additional support: from teachers and TA's outside of the practitioner contact time was essential to enable pupils to complete activities already started with the practitioners;

Stability: one school had changes in leadership and staffing, which impacted on the wider stability of the school. This particular school felt less able to engage with the Arts project during such a period of change. Other schools had experienced more stability and a longer commitment to creativity in the curriculum could be seen.

Previous involvement with the Arts

There was a continuum of engagement with the Arts in schools. No schools did not value the Arts or did not want to engage in some way; but this looked different in each school. One school employed specialist Arts teachers with their own Artist in residence. The teacher explained that class teachers teach English and Maths in the morning, in the afternoon, the teachers each have a specialism, so she only teaches Art. So that means that they can develop subjects in a way that other schools don't have the opportunity to. She did quite a lot of community, which she called 'outreach Art'.

Another was so committed to the Arts, that they had an exhibition space documenting the school's experience in creativity over recent years. One other school, said that before the Warwick Arts Centre project, there was very little engagement with the Arts and that this project single-handedly sparked a change for the better in the creative dimension of their school curriculum.

It was clear that Early Years' practitioners were more accustomed to the type of curricular experience offered by the Warwick Arts Centre project. So to some extent, different phases in a school could be more or less engaged with the Arts. One teacher, a teacher of music was also 'converted' to the idea of a more creative curriculum but recognised that it wasn't always easy to persuade other teachers.

The Festival Management Group

A central part of the Arts Active Network project was to develop an Arts Festival to promote the work of the children. The emphasis according to teachers, children and creative practitioners was that this should be 'for children, led by children'. In order to achieve this, each school provided a number of children to be part of the Festival Management Group. Children explained that the group is split into different teams, for example Front of House Team, Box Office Team, Marketing Team etc.

Through the regular meetings of the Festival Management Group the children identified priorities for the Festival: like the venue, the length, the programme and more generally how it would look on the day. It is true to say that adults were present in the Group meetings. Warwick Arts Centre staff were seen as being particularly helpful due to their previous experience of organising events and festivals. But they also had some facility in working with children. So for instance, when children suggested that the festival could be 6 days long, the Warwick Arts Centre team talked about the manageability and financial limitations. Whilst being led by children, it is true that their ideas were 'channelled' by adults to ensure practicality.

The Festival Management Group met each term to discuss the Festival in 2016-17. Some schools found this quite difficult to manage, as a small group of children would need a Teaching Assistant or Teacher to take them to the meetings. Freeing up staff like this in school was not always easy. Knowing when meeting were due to occur was seen as being important, to try to manage this situation. Creative Practitioners said that they would have been interested to have participated in the Management Group 'to have an artist's input about how the children curated the work'.

The Children's learning

There was unanimous support for the project from teachers, pupils and practitioners. All felt that they had developed a multiplicity of skills in the Arts such as theatre performance, art and design. One teacher gave the example of a Reception trip to Warwick Arts Centre focused on Sculptures; leading the subsequent learning, for example adding together colours, writing performance invitations to parents. However, there were a range of other 'soft skills' that the children had developed as a result of the project such as social skills, resilience, self-regulation, all contributing to better behaviour for learning in the classroom. For instance, one teacher said that:

"in previous times when they'd gone wrong, they would just argue and fight, but to see them actually learn to work together and fill in for each other and cover each other, taught them skills that sitting in a classroom wouldn't..."

Central in the practitioners' feedback was on the developing understanding of the creative process in both pupils and teachers: often a more organic approach to learning than is typical in the school curriculum. For instance, children felt that the drama work was 'more physical' as compared to lots of writing activities in the classroom ('it is mainly Maths and English'). Children said that 'Art is a vehicle for them to express themselves'. They said that "The project promoted the children's 'freedom to make what they want to make; and that this is different from school life'".

One Head teacher was keen to promote wellbeing through the project and the project considered this through abstract shapes and colours. The project sought to develop final artwork which could help children to talk or think about their feelings. Lots of children in the school also reported that following the project they wanted to be artists, actors and do lots more drawing and creative activities. Creative practitioners articulated this somewhat differently: 'children also learnt the language of drama and understood the processes behind a performance 'it doesn't just magically happen'. The Creative Practitioner thinks that she has taught the Class Teacher 'new techniques for working with young people in Drama' where a picture is created where everyone has a role, rather than a main character with lots of extras.

Several schools said that the project had a wider impact on learning and behaviour in schools: "you saw it knock on into the playground, the playground behaviour got better, they started to gel. They didn't become angels, but it got better."

Development of teachers

The Creative Practitioners felt that it was good for teachers to have the 'space and time' for Art. Also having the opportunity to make things with the children as 'co-learning'. It was good for the teachers to develop new skills like laser cutting. Also seeing how they can use existing skills in different ways and considering cross-curricular work. Creative Practitioners reported how teachers were often surprised by children working on things which they had perhaps thought could be too challenging for them. Creative Practitioner gives the example of a Year 1 teacher extending the learning outside of the Arts Project sessions building on the skills developed, for example making a human body out of modelling material.

I mean, for example, last year, I decided to read *The Hobbit* with Year 6. Now Tolkien is a tough, it's a tough text and it's traditionally a secondary school text, but a couple of things, one, I knew they knew the film, even though it's a 12, I knew they knew the film, and so they knew the characters. They had

a connection with it, and we'd done some work in an Arts Project about Fantasy Lands and it just suited it and I thought why should I hide it because it's officially a secondary school text?

One teacher felt that he was becoming a bit 'staid' in his practice. Participating in the project has helped him to become more creative in his own practice with more of a focus on 'doing things, that's when the real learning happens'.

The Arts Festival

The Arts Festival took place on a Saturday in July, on the same day as the town carnival and a fun fayre situated across from the public gardens where the Festival took place. The Warwick Arts Centre staff explained that this timing was not by design, but that it could have been instrumental in highlighting the children's work in the town. There were a significant number of people in the town to see the carnival; and it would seem logical that a number of them wandered into the public gardens to see what was going on in the Festival. Apart from that there were a number of the children's families and a number of teachers who also attended. There was no particular pattern to attendance. In some schools only those pupils and teachers who had taken part, came to the event. In others, the whole school attended. Weather was good, apart from a sporadic shower, but there were sufficient tents and marquees to ensure that events could continue even with bad weather.

There was some debate beforehand about the site of the event. Teachers in particular were concerned about the open nature of the Festival with members of the public able to access the site. Warwick Arts Centre had hired an events company to manage the construction of the site, with security and extra support on the day. This appeared to allay some of the fears of schools. There were no concerns on the day. After the Festival, there was still a debate among teachers about whether to hold the event in school grounds or in public spaces. Practitioners felt that the public space was important to take the experience into the community and recognise the uniqueness of the project.

The Festival Management Group had developed a programme with a balance of external performers and performances by children. Everyone thought that the balance was about right. External performers brought added entertainment, whilst the children's performances were central to the Festival. There was one marquee which presented the process by which the Arts project was developed with some of the work, some short films and images of children on their creative journey. Teachers and practitioners talked about 'real pride in all children and staff who attended for the value of the Arts project'. And that the Festival was very valuable in developing community cohesion between schools, with parents and the wider town community.

The Future

Some schools would like to continue in developing Arts through a project like this, but they were unsure about leadership of the project: many relied on Warwick Arts Centre. There were changes in staffing in some of the schools which also might impact on the longevity of this approach. In one school, the children think that drama work will continue in their school and that it can run without the support of the Creative Practitioner, however they do acknowledge that the Creative Practitioner has been very helpful. In another school, a teacher reports that children were proud of their work. They became empowered and were enthusiastic to be in school. 'School is a really interesting place and sometimes that gets lost in the curriculum' Children wanted to continue their drama work through a Drama Club.

In one school a teacher said: "I think the schools are going to get together again and put in a bid, 'cause the funding runs out at this point, we need to apply, but we need to make it work. I think the target is the next Festival will be in two years, 'cause it takes that long to get the funding and get it."

The top five things

In order to make an Arts Project like this work, pupils, practitioners and teachers were asked to identify the top five things to make it work:

- Involve Warwick Arts Centre;
- Schedule meetings far in advance;
- Provide small amounts of funding which have an exponential impact on the children's experience;
- Work together as a network of schools in a community project;
- Be flexible and open-minded.

The Creative Practitioner identifies that need for Arts Organisations to make links with schools to:

- Increase their status amongst young people;
- Remove barriers to engagement, for example being reluctant to go to the theatre.

Following the Warwick Arts Centre's input in the project, the practitioners hoped that the links 'don't just disappear' with schools. Perhaps the last word should go to children in their evaluation of the whole Arts project:

'I would make it better by doing nothing ... its already good'

'To summarise this, this has been the best Festival I have ever been to in my whole life. Thank you.'

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize points in the evaluation of the Arts project. We return to the original research questions:

What are the benefits & impact of a network of:

d) school communities working & learning together?

- This develops community cohesion;
- Schools with less of a tradition of a creative Arts curriculum can learn from those with more experience;
- It helps to develop the cultural and educational capital of a community.

e) putting children in the creative driving seat & of school communities working with professional artists /arts organisations?

- Children learn in different ways when they are empowered to take ownership of their learning;
- This has a powerful impact on the quality of learning as well as a positive impact on learning outcomes. There is evidence that children surprised their teachers by going far beyond any learning, that their schools could have anticipated;
- The Creative Practitioners provided children with different experiences, different ways of learning, much more organic and less 'objectives-led'. This led to greater empowerment in the children and a more organic approach in teachers who embraced this approach.

f) community/school relationships & on relationships between schools & the arts sector?

- Practitioners explained the importance of breaking down barriers to engagement with the Arts, through Arts projects like this;
- One school realised that the Warwick Arts Centre was a bus ride away from school. Going there sowed the seed of future experiences for the children and their families.

What are the examples of good practise used in this project that can be shared more widely to inform our future work and that of other arts organisations?

e) How do we best facilitate teacher, child and 'artist/ organisation' to work collaboratively?

- Setting up the longitudinal project with an initial experience at the local Arts centre is vital to the start of the process;
- Linking a confident creative practitioner who is experienced in working with schools helps to facilitate the Arts project.

f) How do young people and teachers learn skills together in a shared creative environment?

- Weekly contact with the practitioner and regular meetings between them and the teachers, helps to properly contextualise and embed a creative approach to the curriculum;
- Providing creative experiences for teachers is as important as those for children, if teachers are eventually to be able to model the creative process.

g) How does the balance of control and power in teachers and young people, influence project outcomes?

- Practitioners focused on the creative process, in a more organic approach to learning;

- Developing a more organic approach to the school curriculum helps to embed creative Arts in school and to give children a voice in their learning in a way that the traditional school curriculum does not always offer.

How can this project be sustained over a longer period?

- Bringing together schools, creative practitioners and the Warwick Arts Centre is the way forward;
- Warwick Arts Centre is critical in facilitating this process;
- If the Warwick Arts Centre is not able to directly bid for funding schools collectively or individually could bid for funding, but we would recommend that they build in some resources to enable the involvement of the Warwick Arts Centre

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Galton, M. & Page, C. (2015) The impact of various creative initiatives on wellbeing: a study of children in English primary schools, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 45:3, 349-369.

