

Increased practitioner skills and motivation.

- The projects allowed staff to take risks with the curriculum and develop schemes of work in new ways. For example, lessons in the RE topic of Christianity no longer rely solely on photocopied sheets, but have incorporated dance and drama.

Research Methods

Data were collected in various ways, including pupil / staff questionnaires, videos, photographs, interviews and a CD. In each of the three stages:

- pupils were given questionnaires after each stage of the project and asked to evaluate their learning;
- photographs were taken to document each stage of the project; and
- staff evaluations were analysed.

In addition, in the first (arts) project, pupils' sketchbooks were photocopied and analysed at different stages of the project and a collection of artworks was created.

In the second (French) project, books were photocopied and monitored, pupils were recorded, and a French Rap CD was created.

Conclusion

Although research into the impact of the project is still ongoing, we feel the data we have collected so far indicate that bringing creative elements into the curriculum has benefited both pupils and teachers. The projects were all cross curricular and have impacted on the curriculum by making the curriculum more creative. Staff are not afraid to try out new ideas and use a creative format to deliver schemes of work that are not usually taught in a creative way. The project has made staff realise that pupils are willing to learn if the way in which the curriculum is delivered is made interesting. Pupils have also realised that school and learning can be fun.

Further reading

Judith Bell – Doing your research project
Anna Craft / B.Jeffries Out of our minds Cape


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Can creative projects improve the language and literacy skills of our pupils?


National Teacher Research Panel
engaging teacher expertise

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Aims

The aims of this project were to:

- improve the language and literacy skills of our pupils both written and verbal;
- extend pupils' vocabulary;
- introduce pupils to a different way of learning;
- improve pupils' confidence and self esteem; and
- provide pupils with positive role models.

Dimensions of the study

Both Key Stage 3 (KS3) and Key Stage 4 (KS4) pupils have been involved in the project. The whole project has been in three stages.

- **Stage one** involved 20 Year 10 art & design pupils and two teachers working with four graffiti artists.
- **Stage two** involved 20 Year 10 French pupils and three teachers working with three rap artists, two of whom were French, and one break-dancer.
- **Stage three** involved 450 KS3 pupils and thirty teachers working with 24 artists, rappers, dancers, designers on projects linked with the geography and history curriculum.

Summary of outcomes

Evidence showed that at all three stages the project had an impact on the learning and behaviour of all the pupils who were involved. The main outcomes for pupils were:

- improved language and literacy skills;
- an increase in motivation and a decrease in behavioural problems;
- increased confidence and desire to learn;
- a greater awareness of the opportunities that were available to them post 16; and
- an improvement in self esteem, especially among the less able pupils.

Background and context

The project began after a discussion with other members of staff at a curriculum working party meeting. Staff from various areas of the curriculum expressed their concerns about the pupils' lack of vocabulary and understanding of simple words. It was decided at this point that the school should apply for the Creative Partnerships action research project, and use the project to research ways in which the school could improve the pupils language and literacy skills. The application to Creative Partnerships was successful and the school worked with CP to devise projects that would aim to improve the language and literacy skills of the pupils through an arts format.

Teaching processes and strategies

The coordinator worked with the street arts organisation "Spearfish" to develop creative projects which aimed to improve the language and literacy skills of the pupils. The organisation "Spearfish" was chosen because of their appeal to young people. "Spearfish" introduced practitioners to art forms such as graffiti art, rap, and street dance, and they in turn were able to produce work which was very dynamic and enthused young people.

The school CP coordinator worked with staff to devise three creative projects designed to achieve maximum impact on the pupils involved, in terms of motivating them to become involved in their learning. The project was carried out in three stages.

Stage one

Twenty Year 10 pupils worked with four graffiti artists from the urban arts organisation "Spearfish" and the arts space "Urbis" on a graffiti art project based on future cities. The aim of this project was to develop and improve the pupils' visual language and vocabulary through graffiti art. Twenty pupils worked over a four week period to create an array of graffiti artworks based around the theme of future cities. The pupils worked with the artists to develop their graffiti art skills at the same time as creating a body of artworks that were exhibited alongside the work of Will Alsop at the Urbis Art Gallery, Manchester. The artworks created were very dynamic. Pupils used materials and techniques that were totally new to them. Pupils worked both individually and in groups to develop artworks in varying sizes, from very small 30cm x 30cm collages, to 8ft by 8ft wooden spray painted cubes. The artists worked with the pupils to develop their visual language, as well as their graffiti art skills. As a finale to the project the pupils showcased their skills during a five hour live art show in the centre of Manchester to a 400+ audience.



Stage two

Twenty Year 10 pupils worked with three rap artists to devise a French rap that was professionally mixed and recorded onto CD. The rap was also performed in front of a very large multicultural audience at the Euro cultured arts event in the centre of Manchester on the bank holiday Monday. We aimed to improve and extend the pupils' language, vocabulary and knowledge of French street language through rap music. The pupils worked with the three artists over four days to devise lyrics, improve their understanding of the French language, and enhance their French accents for the rap.



Stage three

450 KS3 pupils worked with 24 artists over a week to improve language and literacy skills in geography and history. The pupils worked with artists, musicians, dancers, illustrators, fashion designers etc over a week to create a selection of artworks and performances which all had the common theme of either VE Day or Japan. Pupils took part in various arts activities that included kimono designing, modern Japanese fashion design, 1940's fashion design, Japanese illustration, war make up, VE day musical raps, 1940's - present day dance, Japanese music including scratch djing and rap. All the work produced over the four days culminated in two showcase performances on the final day. For the Japanese showcase a fashion catwalk was built in the hall and pupils modeled their fashion designs, whilst the raps were performed on stage. In the afternoon the hall was transformed into a 1940's dance hall with a catwalk down the middle. Local war veterans attended the school for the VE day tea dance, whilst pupils modeled and performed their dance routines to rapturous applause from both the veterans and other pupils. The aim of the creative workshops was to extend the pupils' understanding of Japan and VE Day as well as improving the pupils' language skills around these subjects.

Outcomes

Based on analysis of teacher and pupil questionnaires, as well as video, DVD, evaluations, interviews and photographs, we established that the project had an impact in several areas, some of which we had not anticipated.

Pupils became more knowledgeable about the subjects they were studying.

- Pupils in the French rap project extended their understanding of French slang words.
- Graffiti art pupils became very confident about using spray paint and used their knowledge to teach pupils from other classes.
- Geography pupils became more familiar with Japanese culture and formed an understanding of Japanese fashion.

Improved language and literacy skills.

- Pupils' visual language was extended to include phrases such as "manipulate", "layering", "illustrate" etc, and they subsequently became more confident when analysing artworks.

Increase in motivation and a decrease in behavioural problems.

- Pupils who had previously been eager to run out of the door when the bell rang volunteered to stay after school for an extra two hours, and even then wanted to continue working and had to be told to go home!
- One boy who had spent a lot of time in isolation, became very involved in the dance and rap, and performed in front of the whole school on the final day, this surprised staff and allowed the boy to be seen in a different light.

Pupils became more confident and wanted to learn.

- A group of year 7 boys were very eager to learn how to use the sewing machines and make their own kimonos. They ended up doing much of the sewing for the group.
- The attendance for both the Graffiti art project and French rap project was 100%. The following quotes demonstrate how pupils found the projects to be an enjoyable learning experience.

"I really enjoyed this week because it made me realise that learning can be fun."

"I liked learning about Japan and VE day in this way because you learn more than you do if you just look at books."

- Pupils worked very well in teams and across year groups. During all the projects the pupils worked well together and supported one another. This was especially evident during the Japan / VE day project. Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils were mixed up in groups of 20-25. At first the pupils did not mix across year groups, but after an hour or so they began working together and supporting one another. During the final days showcase performances all pupils were cheering one another with their dance performances. One boy quoted this as his highlight of the week: "my best bit was the dancing because everyone from all years were clapping and cheering for one another and it made you feel good"

Pupils became more aware of the opportunities that are available to them post 16.

- The artists discussed career opportunities with the pupils and indicated to the pupils what jobs were available in the art world.

An improvement in the pupils' self esteem especially among the less able pupils.

- One quiet and timid Year 9 boy who had always been on his own, performed a break-dance in front of 450 pupils who all cheered and clapped for him. Since then teachers have noticed an improvement in his confidence and self esteem.
- A girl with cerebral palsy showcased her spray painting skills in front of a large audience in Manchester city centre. She has now become very independent and confident in her art lessons.