

Sport Wales PESS and PLPS Case Study

Cultural Connections:

A co-curricular approach to improving the health and wellbeing of learners

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A co-curricular approach to improving the health and wellbeing of learners

Key Points

- *Cultural Connections summarises how co-curricular activities improved the wellbeing, behaviour and availability to learn of children with behavioural problems in two primary schools.*
- *Using movement to link the National Literacy Framework with local artists increased the children's interest and engagement in learning.*
- *This case study highlights how creative teaching and learning strategies which provide children with a 'voice' can be highly effective in engaging learners.*

Cultural Connections

Context

Physical literacy is a holistic concept which can be described as the 'motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.' (Whitehead, 2014). A growing body of evidence strongly suggests that physical literacy not only allows children and young people to fulfil their physical potential, but also improves attention, concentration, engagement and on-task behaviour. This ensures children and young people are 'available to learn' and have the potential to achieve better outcomes through physical, cognitive and affective development. Physical literacy is unique to each individual and considered fundamental for a child and young person's health and wellbeing as well as playing a key role in facilitating academic achievement.

In 2000 a Welsh task force outlined a number of key actions required to improve standards of PE across Wales. As a result the PE and School Sport (PESS) Programme was set up and managed by Sport Wales (funded by the Welsh Government in 2001) and continued until 2014. The primary aim for the programme was to ensure that 'every young person is challenged and supported in PE and school sport'. PESS focused on up skilling the practitioners. High quality provision across curricular, extracurricular and community activity helps to engage children and young people, providing them with positive activity experiences and the skills, confidence and motivation to be 'hooked on sport' for life. The PESS project has developed a suite of professional development courses and resources to support practitioners working with 3 to 19-year-olds (Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4 and above).

Delivery was managed and supported by expert regional consortia teams with an understanding of physical literacy and the ways in which it can be achieved and improved through the curriculum and the wider community. PESS interventions investigated the potential value of using the physical to create and enhance meaningful learning and improve academic achievement through movement. This approach allowed for the creation and development of bespoke, holistic and child-centred interventions driven by need (as opposed to a 'one-size fits all' approach). Dragon Multi-Skills and Play to Learn developed wide reaching and extensive activities which were used as facilitative vehicles, accepting that the stage of development was more important than age.

The bespoke evolutionary nature of PESS has provided an excellent foundation for the new Physical Literacy Programme for Schools (PLPS). The primary focus of PLPS is to create engaging opportunities that meet the needs of every child, helping them to fulfil their full potential.

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Context (Cont.....)

In conjunction with the PLPS a newly developed Physical Literacy Framework (PLF) will provide practitioners with clear expectations that will help track the progress of every child along their physical literacy journey. The implementation of the PLF across Wales will raise the importance of developing a physically literate nation. However, the need to independently collate, review, analyse and evaluate the PESS evidence base and the introductory phase of the PLPS in raising standards across physical literacy, academic achievement and whole school outcomes is paramount.

SPEAR

In October 2014, the Centre for Sport, Physical Education and Activity Research (SPEAR) at Canterbury Christ Church University was commissioned by Sport Wales to independently review the evidence base for the Physical Education and School Sport Programme (PESS), the Physical Literacy Programme for Schools (PLPS) and the Physical Literacy Framework (PLF). Part of this independent review involves the collation, review, selection, secondary analysis and innovative presentation of case studies evidencing and sharing a range of best practice across PESS and PLPS initiatives. As such, the narrative and analysis of this case study has been conducted by SPEAR with the resources provided by Sport Wales. Consent to identify children, adults and organisations within this case study has been granted.

SPEAR is a cross school and cross faculty research centre at Canterbury Christ Church University established to bring together expertise across and outside the university and to facilitate collaborative working. In particular, SPEAR brings together expertise in Sport and Exercise Science, Physical Education, Education, Health and Tourism and Leisure. SPEAR's research has helped guide and inform public policy to increase physical activity and sport participation among young people by identifying the processes most successful in increasing participation. It has provided a rationale for government investment, contributed to the wider evidence base used by policy makers, and steered programme improvements that enhance physical activity opportunities and experiences.

More details on SPEAR and its work can be found at:

www.canterbury.ac.uk/SPEAR

Cultural Connections

A co-curricular approach to improving the health and wellbeing of learners

Profile

Co-curricular refers to activities which complement, but may not be directly related to, the academic curriculum. These include sports, performing arts, excursions, debates and many other activities undertaken in curricular or extracurricular time. Participation provides learners with important outlets and challenges, alternative resources and life-long learning experiences. A co-curricular approach is often associated with the intellectual, emotional, social and moral development of the child or young person (Acquah and Partey, 2014), transcending the traditional boundaries of academic learning. In educational institutions, the approach may be used to develop character and personality as well as to facilitate academic achievement. Provision of co-curricular activities is a means of educating the whole learner (Fontaine and Cook, 2014).

A successful co-curriculum often depends on building strong links between the school and the wider community, for example, a school might invite local enthusiasts and communities to work with learners or offer learners the opportunity to work on community projects outside of school. Two primary schools in South Wales wanted to explore, through PESS, the potential impact of co-curricular activities (specifically the arts combined with physical activities) on their learners' levels of literacy and aspects of wellbeing including confidence, engagement, and self-esteem.

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The Challenge: What was the problem?

St Joseph's Catholic Primary and Nursery School and Goetre Primary School wanted to explore the potential impact of a creative co-curriculum on specific groups of learners. The learners ranged from year groups 2 to 5 (Foundation Phase through to Key Stage 2) and were either:

- Children from deprived backgrounds.
- Disengaged learners.
- Learners with social/emotional problems.
- Learners who may not be fulfilling their full potential.

The schools wanted to find out how working with artists in a physical environment (incorporating movement) might impact upon the learners' literacy levels and aspects of their wellbeing. In particular the schools were keen to observe any changes in the children's:

- Levels of interest and engagement in learning.
- Confidence and self-esteem.
- Social skills (working collaboratively with others, taking turns, helping others).
- Willingness to voice their opinions and views about activities and their learning experiences.

The Intervention: What did they do?

The team designed and created a bespoke, child-centred, art-inspired physical intervention called 'Cultural Connections'. 16 children (8 from each school) from Foundation Phase to Key Stage 2 were targeted to take part in the intervention over a 10 week period. During this time learners accessed half day sessions with a range of artists (Film Makers, Story Mappers, Graffiti Artists, Movement and Visual Artists, and Musicians).



A sample of movement and visual arts, story mapping, and graffiti sessions

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The Intervention: What did they do?

Where possible each Cultural Connections session was linked to the learners' current learning journey or learning theme. Importantly, all of the artists and community groups involved were from the local area. The idea of engaging local talent was to raise the aspirations of each of the learners as well as connecting them to cultural activities within their community. Prior to the intervention learner profiles were created, providing information on the learners' engagement in learning, enjoyment of lessons, confidence, self-esteem and interaction with peers. Practitioners were asked to observe and analyse the impact of a range of creative activities, updating the learner profiles throughout the intervention to provide a development timeline for each child.

Teachers and/or peers administered learner questionnaires, conducted interviews and used video footage, audio clips, photographs and examples of learner work to track progress. A representative from each school attended every session to observe the activities and record changes in the learners' individual portfolios, while schools organised 'debrief' sessions to gather learners' thoughts, opinions, views and ideas. In addition, sharing and dissemination days were arranged, allowing learners to 'show case' their work both within the school and across the wider community.

Impact: What changed for the children?

The Cultural Connections sessions were reported to successfully engage learners, with notable improvements in behaviour observed by both deliverers and teachers. The sessions enhanced learners' motivation, interest and enthusiasm, each activity capturing the attention of learners so successfully they maintained concentration throughout the sessions. Learners were also able to work effectively either independently, in pairs or as part of a small group and marked improvements were observed in learners' interactions with each other.

Cultural Connections

Impact: What changed for the children?



Graffiti sessions
(click picture to play video)



Movement and visual art sessions
(click picture to play video)



Music sessions
(click picture to play video)



Story mapping sessions
(click picture to play video)



Story mapping sessions
(click picture to play video)

Extracts from session observations of children involved in Cultural Connections from Goetre Primary School and St Joseph's Penarth Primary and Nursery School can be seen on the following pages.

Cultural Connections

Impact: What changed for the children?

Goetre Primary School – Story Mapping Monday

At the first Cultural Connections session, story mapping, one particular learner was refusing to join and started crying as he did not want to miss swimming with his friends. After some gentle persuasion the learner reluctantly agreed to join in with the session. Cheryl Beer was the lead deliverer for the story mapping sessions and did not know that the children had been ‘handpicked’ as requiring ‘extra support’ with their behaviour. However, Cheryl immediately established that concentration and engagement were areas to work on with the learners.

“I did not know the children needed extra support with their behaviour, but I could sense it with their concentration levels almost straight away.”

“I decided that we would need to use as many spaces as possible, be practically based and move from activity to activity at 10 minute intervals to keep the children engaged.”

Cheryl Beer – Story Mapping Lead Deliverer

Cheryl facilitated a number of activities and tasks designed to heighten the senses and imagination of the learners. The activities were designed to encourage learner engagement and enhance each child’s ability to describe their thoughts and feelings about the activity in which they were participating. For example one activity required the children to stand barefoot on the grass. While on the grass the children were asked a series of open questions such as:

“What can you feel under your feet?”

“What does it remind you of?”

“What can you see above you?”

“What does it feel like?”

“What does it smell like?”

Giving the learners a forum in which they could express their feelings and use their imagination really engaged the children. Cheryl noted:

“They all answered the questions excitedly; excited for noticing things they had never noticed before!”

Cheryl Beer – Story Mapping Lead Deliverer

Cultural Connections

Impact: What changed for the children?

Characters for stories were developed through practical activities and from the answers the children provided to questions asked (e.g. Bobby the rat, Kitty the Squirrel and Sam the Seagull). The learners were then asked to describe the habitats in which these characters lived and, with the support of Cheryl, were able to create stories by mapping these characters and their habitats. Each story was mapped on a large piece of A1 paper that was spread across the floor. Cheryl could see that the children were “enchanted by this notion”. The children had to determine the shape of the map (which was to be an island of some kind) and introduce characters to the shape.

“One lad said he thought it should be the shape of a carrot as there would be a rabbit in the story. Everyone agreed.”

Cheryl Beer – Story Mapping Lead Deliverer

When asked what the learners enjoyed about the session they replied:

“Colouring, storytelling, being outside, music and everything was fun.”

The learner who reluctantly joined the session even commented:

“It was better than swimming” and that “Anyway, with our carrot island we were in the sea.”

The teacher who observed the session stated:

“I have never heard the children being so descriptive nor have I seen them so engaged!”

Cultural Connections

Impact: What changed for the children?

St Joseph's Penarth Primary and Nursery School – Light Art

The children were intrigued and excited about the light art session predominately because they did not know what to expect. Sharon Tear, a music and visual arts expert, led the session. Initially children were introduced to words that related to dance. The children were then asked to think about the meaning of each of the words and how they might use them in creating a dance. The children collectively chose three words and in pairs created a series of movements to perform a dance.

“This had a huge impact on Thomas in particular.”

“Thomas has an enormous amount of energy and was able to express this through dance.”

“He was also able to express other areas of himself well and had a really good sense of rhythm, which is not evident in class.”

Teacher observation

The children developed their dance, adding different words to extend the movements. They were then asked to express the words used to create their dance through art. They produced a huge collage of all the different shapes they had used and created to produce the light art.

“In terms of the ‘wow’ factor this session has the biggest impact, because it was completely unlike anything they had done before. The children enjoyed the dark room and being shown the designs they had created, each recognising their own.”

“All the children said they enjoyed this activity the most in their evaluations.”

Teacher observation

Cultural Connections

Impact: What changed for the schools?

Goetre Primary School

Cultural Connections created an environment in which everyone's ideas were valid and important and learners were encouraged to take part in every activity. During sessions the children became inquisitive, creative and descriptive in a way the school had not seen before with this group of learners. Through movement the learners were able to find a voice and through engagement they became 'available to learn'. The school had successfully engaged previously disengaged learners through movement and physical activity delivered by local artists.

“The children thoroughly enjoyed the graffiti sessions and were instantly engaged, as it was something new and interesting to them.”

“It was great to see them take something that can be portrayed as something negative in society and give it a positive light.”

“The children gained confidence and it was notable how engaged they were in the activity. The finished work will be displayed in the junior hall for all to see.”

Teacher observation of Graffiti sessions

St Joseph's Penarth Primary and Nursery School

Cultural Connections was highly valued by the school for its ability to enhance social inclusion, confidence, self-esteem, collaboration and leadership skills. In particular it was believed to have worked well with the older children (Years 5 and 6). While the school felt the initiative did not run for long enough to measure the impact on the literacy levels of the learners, the opportunities of a longer running initiative to develop all aspects of literacy were recognised.

“Cultural Connections was very worthwhile, because it allowed all the children to achieve and shine in a very unthreatening environment.”

“I was also impressed with the level of support the children received from, Claire, Lesley and Paul in order to motivate them during the activities and how the artists modified the activities to suit all learners, as the children were quite a challenging group.”

Cultural Connections

Impact: What changed for the schools?

"I would certainly recommend using all three artists again as all the skills combined could have a great impact on improving literacy and I would certainly like to become involved with this project again."

Teacher observation



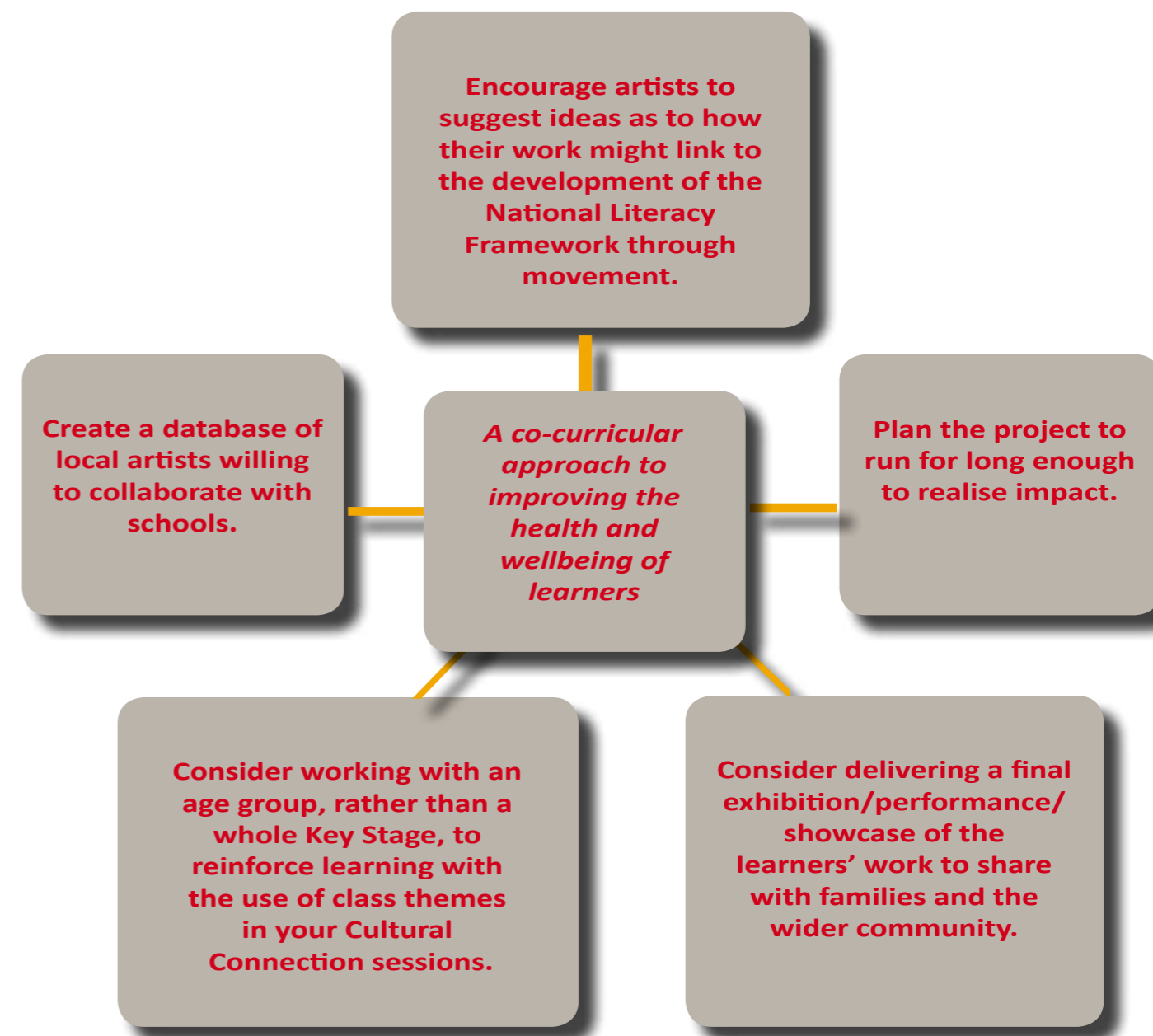
The thoughts of one learner involved in Cultural Connections (click picture to play video)



Cultural Connections explained (click picture to play video)

Cultural Connections

Recommendations: Advice for schools and practitioners



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