

ART OF LEARNING

Report on the work of participating primary schools
in East, North and South Ayrshire

1. Introduction

This report summarises the findings of the Education Scotland commission: 'Provision of Educational Support for the Creativity and Executive Functions Project – The Art of Learning – EDUC #182'. Although the Art of Learning (AOL) was a two-year project, this report focusses on the second year only. It is based upon visits to eight primary schools in East, North and South Ayrshire which took part in the project. Three visits were made to each of the five schools which continued to take part in the project from 2016/17 through to 2017/18. One visit was made to each of the three schools which took part in the project only in 2016/17 and did not wish to continue with the support of artists in the second year.

In addition to the schools and education authorities, the project involved a number of partners: Paul Hamlyn Foundation (funder), Creative Culture and Education (CCE), Creative Scotland and Education Scotland. Assessment and Evaluation of the projects was organised by the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) and CEDITI – a research centre of the Pontifical University of Chile, Santiago.

The five participating schools were: Auchinlech Primary School, East Ayrshire; Girvan Primary School, South Ayrshire; Heathfield Primary School, South Ayrshire; St Mark's Primary School, North Ayrshire; and St John's Primary School, North Ayrshire. The other three schools were Dykesmains Primary School, North Ayrshire; Onthank Primary School, East Ayrshire; and St Patrick's Primary School, East Ayrshire.

In each of the five participating schools, discussions took place with headteachers; principal teachers, where they had been appointed to lead this project; teachers and artists. In addition, lessons were observed and informal discussions took place with pupils, teachers and artists. Some lessons were delivered jointly by teachers and artists and some were taught by the teacher.

In each of the non-participating schools, discussions took place with the headteachers.

The documents associated with the project and made available on 'Padlet' were scrutinised and the associated video files viewed.

2. Findings

The following reflections apply to the five participating schools.

3. Learning, Teaching and Assessment

This section uses the structure of Quality Indicator 2.3 from 'How Good is Our School?', Version 4 (HGIOS4). It has four themes: Learning and engagement, Quality of teaching, Effective use of assessment and Planning, tracking and monitoring.

3.1. Learning and engagement

In all of the schools, teachers and artists had positive relationships with pupils and there was a strong sense of mutual respect between the adults and children. In many classrooms and in public areas there were displays on children's rights and evidence that many classes had carried out learning activities on this topic.

In almost all of the classes, pupils were actively engaged in and enjoyed learning. Most participated enthusiastically in the planned range of activities. In a few cases, pupils did not fully engage with project staff at the beginning of lessons when explanations of the work in hand were overly extended or when complex language was used.

Almost all of the pupils found most of the activities appropriately challenging. A strength of the project was that pupils had to work in unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable situations where they had to demonstrate their views and their feelings on the topic being studied to class mates and staff. The use of drama, role play, class presentations and discussion was a strength and was seen to develop pupils' confidence. In a few lessons, pupils with additional support needs could not fully participate in the learning activities as there was inadequate support to facilitate their involvement. There was evidence that some of the most able pupils were not sufficiently challenged by some of the activities.

In most of the lessons observed there was a great deal of freedom given to children to express their individual views in a variety of ways. For example, children expressed their views in writing, in drawing, in movement or in drama. In many lessons, groups of children worked collaboratively to solve a given problem or come up with an agreed answer. Many found working together challenging, but evidence from discussions with teachers suggests that children's ability to work collaboratively improved over the course of the project. In one notable case, a teacher had to intervene with a group of pupils to resolve the conflict between opposing views. This was done skilfully and used as a teaching point to the class on how to resolve conflicts amicably.

Pupils responded very positively to the use of tablet computers in a number of the planned activities. However, the potential benefits of using digital technology were not fully exploited as a result of the very low level of provision of this technology and the limited IT infrastructure in all of the schools.

In many lessons, pupils worked collaboratively in small groups and there was considerable scope for them to devise their own responses to the questions posed and solutions to the problems. This level of autonomy gave them significant responsibility for their own learning. Pupils were seen taking the lead in their learning on many occasions.

A common feature of nearly all of the classes observed was that time was set aside at the end of each lesson for pupils to reflect on their learning. Generally, this was more than just asking pupils whether they enjoyed the activity; instead, discussion was focussed upon what was achieved in that lesson. It was evident from these discussions that pupils liked being asked for their views and they knew that their opinions were valued.

3.2. Quality of teaching

Most lessons took place in conventional classrooms or in open plan bases; a few took place in larger halls. The limited space in most classrooms made it difficult for teachers to employ the recommended teaching approaches in some of the lesson plans. In a number of these plans teachers were asked to bring the children to the front of the class to carry out an initial starter activity and this was difficult with large classes. In some other cases children were asked to form a circle. This was difficult to do in a conventional classroom setting. In one school, the noise of children in adjacent open plan bases was so intrusive that it interfered with lessons. Children could not hear one another during class discussions.

A major strength of the project was that the lesson plans introduced teachers to many creative ways of starting lessons, organising pupils and using resources. These methods have helped all of the participating teachers to extend their repertoire of teaching approaches.

In the first year of the project, the lesson plans were delivered largely as they were written, and little account was taken of the individual curriculum plans of each class or the learning needs of the pupils. Schools were expected to deliver four, one-hour sessions of the programme each week for ten weeks. This approach was seen as being too rigid by schools as little account was also taken of the nature of each class and pupils' learning needs. Headteachers of schools with more than one class at each stage also felt that this approach did not fit in well with the established arrangements for joint planning. In the second year of the project there was greater flexibility and the AOL lessons were more integrated with the rest of the curriculum. Furthermore, as teachers became more confident in using the new approaches the majority of them started applying them in other curriculum areas.

In all schools the positive relationships between teachers and artists facilitated smooth working arrangements and seamless collaborative teaching. This was largely the result of better planning and deployment of artists. Lesson planning had improved this year as time was set aside for teachers and artists to jointly plan lessons each week. Overall, fewer artists were deployed for longer blocks of time in each school this year (five weeks rather than two). Together these arrangements helped to build positive relationships between artists and teachers.

Part of the project included aspects of 'digital learning'. In one case there was an introduction to the technical aspects of creating film and using photographic techniques. For example, pupils were involved in creating story boards, learning about the use and benefits of different types of shots such as 'close-ups' and 'long-shots' and then applying them in lessons. In all cases observed, pupils were motivated by the use of digital technology in these specifically designed digital learning lessons. However, the scope of teachers to use digital technology to enhance learning was restricted by the limited number of digital devices in the 'digital learning' lessons and because tablets or laptops were not generally available at other times. For example, when children were composing Haiku poems.

The music lessons would have been enhanced if pupils had opportunities to develop their skills with musical instruments. The lessons observed involved children following rhythms by clapping. These would have been enriched and made more meaningful with the use of a range of musical instruments.

Overall, teachers and artists explained tasks clearly during lessons. Only a few teachers shared the purpose of learning by providing the 'learning intentions' at the beginning of lessons and fewer entered into discussions about the 'success criteria' which could be used to evaluate how successful the lesson had been. These are not necessary criteria for all types of lessons and learning. In the lessons observed, it was more common for discussions to emerge during and especially at the end of lessons about what had been learned and achieved. For example, in some lessons teachers would explain which 'executive function' was being developed by a particular activity. This approach was successful in a number of classes as pupils began to recognise individual executive functions and the activities which would help to develop them. On a few occasions pupils were seen to volunteer the name of the skill they were developing during specific learning activities.

The quality of teachers questioning varied in the lessons observed. In the majority of lessons, it was skilful and teachers challenged pupils appropriately and promoted learning well. Teachers frequently asked open-ended questions and this led to imaginative responses. Where teachers asked pupils for their views the positive response of teachers and especially artists in almost all lessons promoted confidence.

Teachers were skilled at intervening with groups and individuals to further learning. They were generally quick to respond if a group was not working well or did not fully understand the task in hand. The most skilful teachers asked challenging questions of groups and individuals to deepen their learning.

In almost all of the activities observed, the tasks were not designed to have a single answer; many answers were possible depending upon the pupils' imagination. In these cases, teachers praised pupils for producing a result which complied with the criteria of the task. In cases where pupils did not fully understand the criteria; for example, when pupils did not use the correct number of syllables in an Haiku poem, teachers generally explained patiently again the criteria for constructing these poems. Overall, teachers' and artists' feedback was positive and encouraging and had the effect of promoting creativity and developing pupils' confidence.

3.3. Effective use of assessment

Teachers used a variety of assessment methods in this project. However, it was not clear how the different approaches helped to improve children's learning.

Teachers and headteachers thought that the assessment arrangements were better this year, but they were still overly complex.

Digital assessments were used across the project to assess the improvement in pupils' executive functions. A sample of pupils in each school were assessed by CEDITI at the beginning and end of the project to determine if there had been an improvement in the executive functions. As there was no feedback from these assessments to the approaches used by teachers, this assessment was of more interest to the project's sponsors than to the teachers. The impact of using this approach to assessment or its implementation were not scrutinised.

The CUREE sponsored assessments involved teacher reports on a sample of pupils and pupil self-assessment using the 'Blob Tree Diagram'. These assessments were focussed on aspects of personal and social development. Personal and social skills included pupils' self-confidence and their ability to collaborate with others. It would have been possible to assess all pupils involved in this project using standardised personal and social development assessments and this approach would have provided information on the progress of each pupil.

The CEDITI and CUREE forms of assessment have the potential to indicate progress of a few individuals in any one class and this information would be aggregated across the participating schools.

The AOL project would have gained from more formative assessment procedures. These would have provided teachers with timely information on the progress and achievement of all pupils. As a result of the lack of feedback from the project's assessment procedures, teachers had to rely upon informal approaches to adjust their teaching to meet the individual learning needs of pupils.

Furthermore, the assessment methods used were not aligned to the standards of Curriculum for Excellence and therefore it was not possible to evaluate how well pupils have progressed against these standards. Schools have not been able to report in detail to parents on the progress children have made or the standards they have attained while taking part in the project. There has been little if any moderation of the standards achieved across participating schools

3.4. Planning, tracking and monitoring

In all of the schools, teachers and artists produced clear plans on the topics which were to be taught over the time span for the project. The provision of time for teachers and artists to plan together this year is an improvement on the first year of the project when no such time was made available. Furthermore, in this second year of the project, all schools took steps to integrate the AOL lessons with the rest of the curriculum. The positive impact of this was that AOL lessons were more meaningful to pupils and did not appear to be an extra 'add on' which had no relevance to the other work of the class. However, as this project was designed to improve children's executive functions through an intensive programme of expressive arts within a 'high functioning classroom', the integration with other curriculum plans may have reduced the impact of the project on improving the executive functions of the pupils.

As stated earlier, in nearly all of the lessons observed, pupils had many opportunities to contribute their own ideas in their groups or individually to the class. They were not involved in planning learning on a larger scale.

As the assessment methods did not provide information on individual pupils there was not a system to track the progress of all pupils.

4. Creativity

This section uses the themes of HGIOS4 Quality Indicator 3.3, Increasing Creativity and Employability. It has four themes: Creativity skills, Digital innovation, Digital literacy and Increasing employability skills.

4.1. Creativity skills

A strong feature of the AOL project was the emphasis which was placed upon developing creativity in the context of expressive arts. In every lesson observed, teachers or artists provided activities which promoted an aspect of creativity. Teachers and artists often discussed the development of the creative skills explicitly with their classes. They also valued highly and celebrated the creative responses of pupils.

Pupils demonstrated curiosity in the majority of lessons and the activities stimulated both individuals and groups to ask good questions. In almost all lessons there were many opportunities for pupils to use their imaginations and generate their own ideas. This aspect of creativity was evident in visual arts, movement and dance, drama, poetry and in craft activities. Pupils were often encouraged to be open minded and explore issues or artefacts from different viewpoints. For example, in one lesson a group of pupils were encouraged to think and discuss what it would be like to be present in a particular picture or what mood the artist was trying to convey. Aspects of problem solving were also evident in many lessons and as mentioned earlier, pupils working in groups were frequently asked to provide answers to novel questions posed by teachers. It was also evident from discussions with teachers that many pupils improved their

ability to present their ideas. Frequently, pupils were asked to present their ideas to the class or occasionally at a school assembly.

Teachers said that many pupils grew in confidence over the time of the project and improved their sense of self-esteem through participating in the project.

4.2. Digital innovation

Over the whole project there were limited opportunities for pupils to develop digital solutions. However, in the lessons observed, small tablet computers provided by the AOL project, were used by groups of pupils to view artwork or film a group's small scale role play.

This aspect of the project could have been developed further if there were more digital resources and better IT infrastructure in the schools. For example, in this context of expressive arts, pupils could be asked: to create 'stop motion' animated films to convey a particular message; to compose and play music using software such as 'Garageband'; to create digital artwork they could use any one of many graphics or art apps; or they could use digital video to compile individual video journals which evaluate and log their progress. In these and other applications of digital technologies in the creative arts, pupils would have additional opportunities to be creative and develop relevant higher order thinking skills of analysis and evaluation as well as furthering their digital skills.

4.3. Digital literacy

Pupils were motivated by the limited use of digital technology in the AOL lessons observed. They enjoyed the novelty of using the tablet computers. However, there were not enough opportunities for them to explore the use of digital technologies to enhance their learning. As a consequence, they were not in a good position to make informed choices about the use of different digital technologies or media.

With a sufficient number of computers pupils could be given a choice of how they wanted to share their learning. For example, individuals or groups could be asked to create a digital presentation or create a digital poster or create a document with text and graphics or create a video of them talking about their learning.

The schools did not appear to share children's learning with parents using digital technologies. Applications such as 'Seesaw' can be used very effectively to enable parents and fellow pupils to share their work and comment on it. This type of software provides a safe environment for pupils to share their work.

4.4. Increasing employability skills

As discussed earlier in this report, pupils were developing many skills through the AOL project which are relevant to enhancing their future employability. It was mentioned earlier in this report that pupils were developing their skills of collaboration and communication. There was evidence that the project had helped to improve some pupils' self-confidence, resilience and interpersonal skills. However, although these skills were being developed in the context of expressive arts, their relevance to the world of work was never made explicit by teachers in the lessons observed.

There were opportunities for teachers to discuss possible careers in creative arts and the use of digital technologies, but these opportunities were missed in the lessons observed.

Pupils valued working with professional artists and admired their particular skills and talents. As positive relationships had been developed with artists, pupils found opportunities to ask them about their work outside of school. This gave them an insight into some of the creative industries and the world of work.

5. Leadership and management

5.1. Strategic management

In all of the five schools the headteachers were keen for their schools to participate in the project. They all felt that the project would enrich the curriculum by providing a sharper focus on the expressive arts, thus providing a better overall balance given the emphasis which had been placed recently upon numeracy and literacy. They all felt that the overall aims of the project were in keeping with their other key aim which was to improve the outcomes of pupils and 'close the attainment gap'. A number were particularly attracted to the project as one of its aims was to improve the executive functions of 'disadvantaged pupils'.

The senior leaders thought that the training provided by the project and working with artists would help to develop the skills of the teachers involved. This is an important role for headteachers and is especially relevant given that the availability of up to date training for teachers was limited. Middle leaders and other teachers commented favourably on the training which was provided by the project. They all felt that they learned a great deal from working with the artists.

All of the headteachers felt that the project had improved in the second year. The following factors were cited: the greater flexibility in planning which enabled lessons to be more tailored to meet the needs of the pupils; the provision of time for teachers and artists to work together; the change in deployment of the artists; and the reduction in the complexity of the assessment arrangements.

Nevertheless, some headteachers felt that the project and the assessment arrangements were still too complex. A few commented negatively on the high number of emails and the high number of visitors.

5.2. Operational management

The management arrangements for the AOL project varied across the five schools. In two of the schools the project was managed by the headteacher; in two others, management had been delegated to class committed principal teachers and in one school, management was delegated to a non-class committed principal teacher.

The AOL project had a significant impact on the middle leaders who had responsibility for the project. Each took the project seriously and worked well with the teachers and artists involved. In the best practice, the principal teachers worked closely with the teachers and artists to plan lessons and organise the assessments. This project provided a very good opportunity for them to develop their leadership skills.

Through monitoring arrangements and discussions, both headteachers and principal teachers were fully aware of the positive impact the artists were having on their teachers. In a few cases, the leaders were looking for specific changes in the teachers' approach to teaching as a result of working with the artists. For example, in one case it was hoped that a teacher would be more flexible and more responsive to her class as a result of working with an artist and take a more creative and less risk averse approach to planning and delivering lessons. In another case, through a teacher working with an artist it was hoped that this would help to 're-energise' the teacher.

The project did not create any specific difficulties with the provision and management of resources beyond the constraints which already existed in the school. However, the demands on accommodation were more testing and most of the schools managed these demands well within their available facilities. It was mentioned earlier in the report that in one school there were serious limitations to the accommodation which significantly constrained learning in this and all areas of the curriculum.

6. Impact

The AOL documentation defined the project in the following terms:

"The Art of Learning in 2017/18 is a complex and multi-layered action research initiative around three key investigations:

1. executive functions - closing the attainment gap in disadvantaged areas by supporting pupils' creativity through the arts
2. professional development for teachers and artists – co-creating and using creative learning across the curriculum
3. embedding learning for national partners and funders – a) in Scotland for educational purposes, b) for Paul Hamlyn Foundation to evolve their Teacher Development Fund."

The focus of this report is on the first two areas.

6.1. Impact on pupils

Over the course of the 10-week project:

- In all of the classes observed, most pupils were fully engaged in learning and enjoyed the AOL activities. A few pupils with additional support needs were unable to participate to the same extent.
- From class observations, there were signs that pupils' creativity was developing as a result of the methodology employed by all of the teachers.
- Teachers reported that many pupils improved their confidence and their ability to express their views to their classmates
- Teachers reported that a significant number of pupils improved their skills in working collaboratively with their peers.
- Teachers and headteachers reported that pupils were much better at reflecting on their learning than their peers who had not taken part in the project.

- In a few classes, pupils were able to identify and name the executive function they were using. Some teachers reported that many pupils' 'inhibitory control' had improved as a result of using specific learning strategies.
- it was not possible to attribute or identify any overall improvement in pupils' attainment as a result of their participation in the project.

6.2. Impact on parents

All of the schools shared their participation in the AOL project with parents in newsletters. In some schools, pupils have delivered presentations at assemblies on AOL and in others they have been available at parents' nights to share their progress. Schools have not included AOL in their reports to parents. Overall, there was scope to increase parents' awareness of and involvement in the project.

6.3. Impact on teachers

The quality of teaching observed in each school was good or better. A few lessons were outstanding. Through participating in the AOL project:

- All teachers applied new techniques from the lesson plans. Many reported that they found the structure of 'warm up' activity, 'main' activity and 'reflection' in the lesson plans very helpful.
- All teachers enjoyed working with the artists.
- Teachers reported that working with the artists has helped them to adopt a more creative approach to lesson planning.
- Teachers reported that working with artists in the classroom has helped them to try new methods and be less risk averse.
- The majority of teachers have successfully applied some of the AOL techniques in other curriculum areas.
- A few teachers reported that they have gained confidence in teaching aspects of the expressive arts as a result of working with the artists.

6.4. Impact on schools

The project has had a significant impact on the classes involved but a limited impact on schools as a whole.

- Each of the five schools included some discussions of the project and sharing of practice with all teachers at collegiate time. However, there has been very little if any spread of the AOL methodology to other practitioners in the schools during the 10 week term of the project or as a result of the schools' involvement last year in the project. It would appear that most teachers feel more confident in using AOL activities and methodology when an artist is associated with the class.
- Two of the five schools have clear strategic plans to take forward AOL next session. The plans of the other schools are not known.

6.5. Impact on education authorities

It is difficult to evaluate the impact of the project on local authorities as only one authority was seen to actively participate in the project.

7. Key strengths

The AOL project has:

- Provided opportunities for pupils to experience a range of expressive arts activities with support from professional artists
- Provided primary children with many enjoyable, engaging and motivating learning experiences
- Provided an ethos in which creativity across the arts was promoted and nurtured
- Improved pupils' learning skills by developing their ability to work collaboratively and reflect on their learning
- Developed the confidence of some pupils through taking part in a range of challenging activities
- Improved teachers' knowledge and skills of expressive arts by working with professional artists
- Provided teachers with a wider range of strategies to promote creativity and ways of organising pupils for different types of learning activities
- Helped teachers to be less risk averse when giving pupils more responsibility for their own learning
- Provided each pilot school with lesson plans which can be adapted and used throughout the school at different stages and in different curriculum areas
- Enabled middle leaders to develop their leadership and management skills

8. Recommendations

8.1. Schools

- Adapt and use the CCE lesson plans in expressive arts across the school with the support of the teachers who have been involved in the AOL project.
- Apply aspects of the AOL methodology to different curriculum areas across the school with support from the teachers who have been involved in the AOL project.
- Map the achievement of pupils against the Expressive Arts Experiences and Outcomes and the Expressive Arts Benchmarks.
- Track the progress of pupils through any future extension of AOL.
- Develop further pupils' skills of reflection by asking them to write a journal on their learning as they progress through future work of this type.
- Make better use of digital technologies to further learning and develop relevant digital skills.
- Take advantage of opportunities within lessons to promote the 'Developing the Young Workforce' agenda.

8.2. Education authorities

- Publicise the successful aspects of this project in the school cluster and wider authority by drawing on the knowledge of headteachers and participating teachers.
- Provide support to the pilot schools to help them to embed successful aspects of the AOL project.
- Provide more up to date digital resources and appropriate infrastructures to support better use of digital technologies to further pupils' learning.

8.3. Paul Hamlyn Foundation and CUREE

- Reduce the complexity of assessment and administrative arrangements.

8.4. Education Scotland

- Publicise the successful aspects of the AOL project as a means of developing creativity and promoting the benefits of children participating in a rich expressive arts curriculum.
- Use the National Improvement Hub to show how some of the AOL techniques can be used by teachers throughout Scotland.
- Have a 'Creativity week' each year to promote the importance of creativity across the curriculum.
- Ask one or more of the participating schools to run a joint seminar on the AOL project at the Scottish Learning Festival.



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Annex 1: Non-participating schools

Three schools took part in the AOL project in 2016/17 and decided not to continue with support in 2017/18.

The main reason these schools did not wish to continue was that they did not like the rigid approach of having to teach four one-hour standardised lessons on expressive arts each week. Some of the headteachers felt that this did not take sufficient account of the on-going work of the class or the learning needs of the pupils.

In one school the loss of the teacher who was involved in the project last year was also put forward as a reason for not continuing with the project.

In another large school, the senior leaders considered that the school's established joint planning arrangements among teachers at the same stage could not be sustained with the AOL project taking place in just one of the classes.