
Creative Practitioners Training Programme

Project aims

West Lothian Council, Perth & Kinross Council and Falkirk and Stirling Council's (Forth Valley Creative Learning) would collaborate to provide a training programme for artists working in participatory settings. In partnership with the creative producing company Hidden Giants, we would provide training to a range of established and emerging artists working in participatory setting.

Over the past few years the work delivered within the Creative Learning Networks in Scotland has tried to develop a shared language, practice, and understanding of creative learning between artists and schools to promote good practice. As employers of artists who we ask to work in schools it is imperative we recruit the best quality practitioners who have a clear understanding of the creativity agenda and their role within the education system. We felt there was a skills gap and demand to establish a training programme that explored the changing role of the participatory artists working in the formal education system.

We wanted to test if a training programme could challenge artists to adapt their practise by exploring their role within a theoretical context then through practical pilot projects in schools. We aimed to offer a series of three training days for artists with input from a range of practitioners including teachers and established artists.

Our intentions included:

- We wanted the artists to develop another 'string to their bow' making them more employable.
- We wanted the schools engaged in the pilots to see the difference between a 'creative practitioner' and an 'artist in education'.
- We wanted our artists to be confident to find new approaches to teaching and learning.
- We wanted to strengthen our network of schools and teachers.

The project looked to progress several of the ArtWorks outcomes including: A more professional and confident sector; better infrastructure for training and development; and clear models of practise which can be shared.

What we did

The project recruited 7 artists at different stages of their careers and with different art forms specialisms, who participated in 3 days of training. The artists then delivered pilot projects in 6 primary schools across 5 local authorities. The project culminated with a daylong event at the Tollbooth in Stirling that attracted over 70 practitioners and teachers from across Scotland.

Training Days

The first stage of the programme was 3 training days, held over 3 weeks, in 3 different local authority areas. The days were facilitated by Hidden Giants with specific input from a number of teachers, head teachers and artists. The first session focused on current issues within primary education with input from a head teacher from a local primary. The exercises explored the impact of education policy and curriculum on the creative practitioner and how best to support teachers and pupil shape learning. Through practical exercises, films and case studies the artists were challenged to see their role as a creative catalyst/provocateur/agent and why that label might be more useful within the education system.

Session two focused on secondary education and interdisciplinary learning. A member of the senior management team in Stirling Council led a session on the pressures faced by teachers in an exam driven culture. The group then explored the creative practitioner's role in connecting subjects through project based learning.

Session three supported the group to plan the pilot projects together whilst creating a job description for a creative practitioner. This session laid the foundations for the artists to meet their schools in December to plan their projects to be delivered in January.

Pilot Projects

Seven artists worked with 6 schools across 5 local authorities each delivering a 2 month project in response to an initial brief offered by a classroom teacher. The schools identified were part of a wider network that had embraced creative learning philosophy and worked with our practitioners. The project wanted to ensure the artists were able to experiment which meant ensuring the schools had confidence in our approach.



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The outputs for the 6 projects were very different:

- an unusual take on a history project with P1's
- a Robert Burns immersive event with P7's
- an expansive music project exploring transport with P3's
- a highly original Spanish project with P5's
- an alternative take on internet safety using an axe with P7's
- a science experiment through sculpture with P4's

The 6 projects were incredibly unique and well received by their host schools but they were not the important part of the training. The journey of the artists and how they adapted their approach was our key focus. The artists worked as creative practitioners to liberate their practise and allowing them to break away from traditional practise to find routes into different curriculum areas, art forms and philosophical questions. They realised they were not necessarily there to make art but instead explore a context in collaboration with the teacher and pupils.

What the project achieved

One of the key learning that emerged from the 3 days of training was the importance of artists and teachers being in the same room and finding a shared language – one that unites them as learning practitioners. The training aimed to break down assumptions and address historical notions of schools, artists, and education. If artists are to adapt their approach when working in schools there is a need for open and honest conversations to happen that bring people together to better understand each other. We often hold onto the folklore of the past which can restrict an artist and teacher as they predict what will happen before a project has started. There is a need to address the culture of ‘teacher sitting marking in the corner’ and ‘artists being frustrated’. This can only happen if we find shared language and do things differently.

The training allowed the artists to focus on the planning of the project and not the delivery. Despite obviously wanting a high standard of delivery in classrooms the emphasis was always on the collaboration with the teacher and in the planning. Employers and schools are often too quick to send artists to deliver something without appreciating, if they were to consult the artists first, they may find something different and potentially more enriching would emerge. The training helped the artists and teachers see the potential of starting with very little, embracing the unknown and working out.

It became clear the artists were not there to replicate or reinforce the curriculum but to help pupils and teachers reimagine it. This was a crucial part of the learning. Suddenly an artist in a school became a potent strategic collaborator that was comfortable in a classroom but also seemed to support the overall vision of the school. If we support artists to position themselves within these roles we start to see transformation within our education system.

To allow this to happen we need to support more artists to question their role within the education system. The training asked questions about the historical notion of the visiting artists making art with children. The trainee artists were challenged to consider what the implications would be if they didn't make art at all or if they changed art form? As a result all the artists found new routes into different aspects of their practice which they had either forgotten or not deemed relevant when working in schools. These were often the skills we use during a creative process: the questioner, the disruptor, the researcher, the collaborator, the critical thinker, the maker, the risk taker. Suddenly when you place these skills within a restrictive system they become incredibly useful.

To support artists who work in schools we need those who employ them to have a better understanding of how best to utilize their skills, i.e do you send them in to make art or do they have another purpose. We need employers to understand the difference between employing an artist in education and a creative practitioner/catalyst/agent.

The triangulation of training needed for artists, schools and employers is critical. We learned we have a healthy network of likeminded practitioners but we want to work with more which means capacity building the key stakeholders and getting everyone to think differently about how to employ and work with artists in schools.

As a result of the training we have 7 artists who are working differently in schools. These artists will have a huge impact on the pupils they work with but more importantly the staff they collaborate with. There is a critical need for more trained creative practitioners to be working with teachers to support them to deliver a creative curriculum fit for the 21st century.

Our network of schools has strengthened and grown. The teachers who partnered with the artists are keen to learn more and have indicated they have adapted their practice as a result of the collaboration. We want a body of schools in Scotland to adopt a creative approach and pioneer new approaches to teaching and learning.

The local authorities involved in the project have increased their portfolio of case studies of quality creative learning projects within their local area. They have started discussions with other schools to develop new projects during the academic term 16/17.

One of the areas (Forth Valley) will host a 2 day national conference in June highlighting the approach adopted and aims to draw attention to the training project.

Lessons learned

This pilot project reinforced for participants the fact that there is a lack of information within the school system around the role of the creative practitioner at present, which was one of the driving contextual factors for the project in the first place. Despite some of the teachers having previously worked with us they still had an expectation of an artist coming to their school to 'paint a mural'. We feel the training has highlighted a need for more training but also more education for teachers into the benefits of collaborating with a creative practitioner.

Despite offering mentoring support to the artists they did not take up the offer. It was felt this was due to lack of time and logistical issues. In future training it would be useful to explore how mentoring could be built in to support the artists throughout.

We now recognise the need to build on our infrastructure to support more training opportunities in the future. Over the past 3 years we have developed an informal relationship that brings 5 local authorities and Hidden Giants together to share, collaborate and plan. We believe there is a need to strengthen this collaboration to ensure our infrastructure is able to progress the learning from this training.

The key success factors were:

- good people in the same physical space openly sharing concerns and challenges then working them through together
- promoting other approaches to what we have always done and then offering the space to create them
- having both a theoretical and practical element to the training
- having existing relationships with schools

What is happening next?

We plan to create 6 mini films which will go on the Creative Scotland website and become part of the Artists and Teachers resource. We aim to locate future funding to expand on the pilot ensuring other artists, schools and employers have the opportunity to participate in future training.

The work delivered by the Creative Learning Networks will continue and we aim to work with the artists who participated in this training. It is important we provide them more opportunity to continuously progress their thinking and practice. The schools are keen to bring some of the artists back to engage with new teachers and classes.

We don't believe in barriers. We are a creative network of people who must find ways to make this work happen and take the learning forward.

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