

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Teacher Development Fund

Embedding learning through the
arts in the primary curriculum

Part of an independent evaluation of the pilot
programme 2016–18 by the Centre for the
Use of Research and Evidence in Education

Case study

St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary
School, Full Steam Ahead

Location: Ballycastle, Northern Ireland

Project developed by Into Film and Nerve Centre

This study focuses on the role teachers can play as 'arts leaders' and examines how arts-based learning can support pupils experiencing disadvantage.



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Introduction

Improving people's education and learning through the arts is central to the Teacher Development Fund.

This Fund aims to enable teachers and school leaders to develop their skills, knowledge and experience in order to embed learning through the arts in the primary curriculum. The Teacher Development Fund (TDF) was initially developed as a two-year pilot programme running from September 2016 to July 2018.

From May to August 2018, the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) carried out case studies of four individual schools participating in the TDF pilot as part of its evaluation of this programme:

- Burry Port Community Primary School/Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Porth Tywyn, Listening to Language/Cerdd Iaith (Burry Port, Wales)
- Heathfield Primary School, Art of Learning (South Ayrshire, Scotland)
- Hotspur Primary School, Concordia (Newcastle, England)
- St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School, Full Steam Ahead (Ballycastle, Northern Ireland)

The purpose of engaging in the process was to support future projects to understand what successful embedding learning through the arts in the curriculum looks like in individual schools, and to give texture to what this 'embedding' means and some of the different ways of going about that.

This case study explores the ways St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School acquired a sophisticated understanding of the technical aspects of film (as consumers and creators) and translated this understanding to students. In particular, it looks at how this enabled pupils experiencing disadvantage to engage with film in a deep, critical fashion and become ambitious to push forward their own creative uses of film in multiple ways.

St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School – Full Steam Ahead



Into Film sharing event for teachers and senior leaders focuses on embedding film in the curriculum. Photo: Into Film.

School background and context

St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School and Nursery Unit is a Catholic primary school in Ballycastle, a coastal town in Northern Ireland. In 2017–18, there were 388 pupils, aged 4–11, at the school: 25.5% were eligible for free school meals (slightly below the national average of 29%), and 24% had special educational needs. Most of the children attending the school come from the town and the surrounding rural area: 94.5% of pupils are Catholic.

In its most recent schools' inspection by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland in 2014, the school was rated as 'very good' for its achievement and standards, provision and nursery unit, and as 'outstanding' for leadership and management.

Overview of the Teacher Development Fund project

From September 2016 to June 2018, the school participated in the Full Steam Ahead project, a programme delivered by Into Film in conjunction with the Nerve Centre, a creative learning centre in Northern Ireland working with schools to promote digital literacy and the creative use of multimedia and emerging technologies.

The intervention was focused on supporting schools in embedding film literacy, conducting critical analysis of film and film making as an approach to enhancing engagement, and introducing film production, presentation and assessment to the curriculum. During its first year, the project aimed to empower teachers to deliver film-making activities in the classroom, through a continuing professional development and learning (CPDL) programme of guided learning, reflection and sharing of good practice. In the second year, the key area for enquiry was teacher confidence and autonomy: how teachers can be supported to independently embed learning through the arts in the curriculum and what this looks like. There was a focus on specific skill development and the transfer of learning as teachers developed into film leaders in their schools.

Two teachers from St Patrick's & St Brigid's, a P6 teacher (also the ICT coordinator) and a P7 teacher, participated in the project along with the head teacher, working with a Nerve Centre artist practitioner. The project activity encompassed the three terms of the school year, beginning with a teacher development day for learning and sharing skills, followed by one day of in-school support from the Nerve Centre artist practitioner to help teachers independently deliver film lessons in their school, and in the final term working towards delivering a whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) session to colleagues.

Evidence for this case study report was gathered from:

- interviews with individual teachers, including one teacher who had participated in the Into Film training
- an interview with the head teacher
- school documentation, including inspection reports, curricular planning documents, school vision and values
- a focus group activity with a class of P6 pupils
- evidence from CUREE's overall evaluation of the TDF relating specifically to the school, including surveys, enquiry tools and notes from site visits

Professional learning environment

Teachers as professional learners in learning through the arts

The core CPD delivery for the Full Steam Ahead project was split across the three school terms in both its first and second year. Each term, the two participating teachers from the school were invited to attend a full-day teacher development day that focused on establishing them as film leaders, sharing skills in advanced film literacy, film making and animation, and reflection. The teachers also received one day each term of in-school support from the Nerve Centre artist practitioner to develop their capacity for offering film lessons in their school independently. During the third term, the focus of the in-school support was working towards facilitating a CPD session on embedding film in the curriculum for other colleagues in the school.

One of the participating teachers, the school's ICT coordinator, described how she had led a whole staff CPD session at the beginning of the summer term that focused primarily on developing teachers' technological skills in using green screens and iMovie for film making as a basis for exploring the potential role of film in the classroom. The approach during and since this session has so far centred around introducing teachers to new ways of using film literacy and film making in the curriculum and allowing time in May and June for them to experiment with this in their own classrooms.

The intention was to sequence this to enable teachers to build film use into curriculum planning across the school from September onwards. Looking ahead to next year, the head teacher anticipates a need to devise a linked system in the school where CPD can take place during school hours, based on disseminating learning through modelling and leading by example – for example, through in-class observations – due to the limited opportunities for out-of-school CPD owing to industrial action in Northern Ireland.

Focusing teacher learning on pupil achievement

Throughout Full Steam Ahead, the school has maintained a strong focus on situating its own learning through film and film making in the context of the achievement, engagement and needs of their learners. As one teacher commented during the project evaluation: "Using film can support pupils facing totally different forms of obstacles." There is also a focus on giving all pupils the opportunity to look back on the success of what they've achieved in creating their own films, "especially for those who don't excel in other areas of the curriculum" and on teachers learning high-level skills in animation and film that can be transferred to pupils. These goals were mentioned as a positive by a number of teachers interviewed and were referenced by the head teacher.

Use of specialist arts expertise

The specialist expertise input in learning through film has been sourced between participating teachers and Into Film and Nerve Centre practitioners, a relationship the school is keen to continue following the conclusion of the project. In a learning log kept as part of the project evaluation, one teacher described the value in working with the Nerve Centre practitioner, both to begin with in introducing the techniques, as "showing the children the best way of filming", and in particular when planning her own CPD session for staff: "I am so used to working it all out myself for staff meetings. It was a nice change to have someone else to bounce ideas off. [The artist practitioner] was good at making suggestions for things to include that I hadn't thought of."

Collaboration and peer support

One of the aims of Full Steam Ahead was to develop participating teachers as 'film leaders', with the skills and autonomy to disseminate their learning and support other teachers in their school. As a result, collaboration and peer-to-peer support has been built into the school's model for developing the approach within and beyond the project. For example, the ICT coordinator, who participated in the project, has been working with her fellow P6 teacher to feed learning from the training back into the curriculum planning for their classes, and there are plans for the ICT coordinator to work with the literacy coordinator to explore how their respective approaches to using film in the curriculum can complement the learning in each.

Teachers are also exploring ways they can take ownership of and make new initiatives within their learning. As one teacher commented: "Now that [the ICT coordinator] is so confident, I feel confident in doing what she has shown us, or comfortable to go and ask her to demonstrate something to me." She explained that one approach for peer-to-peer learning they are looking at is lesson swapping, developing teacher and pupil learning in tandem: "She would take my class for a day while I took hers, and would explain to them more deeply how to do things, so that they could then show me... They pick things up really quickly!"

"I learned that you can use your green screen to go anywhere in the world."

P6 pupil

Teaching and learning through the arts

Teaching and learning approaches and strategies to learning through the arts

According to the head teacher: "The children now don't see learning through film as an add-on, they see it as part of their curriculum...It happens naturally. It is part of the process of teaching and learning, another resource and another means of what makes our teaching and learning outstanding." He explained how the incorporation of these approaches and strategies into the curriculum, as well as persuading other staff of the benefits, have been the key to success.

In the first year of the project, teaching focused on "getting pupils comfortable" with the language for analysing and understanding film, such as the three Cs (colour, camera, character) and three Ss (story, setting and sound), and applying this learning to literacy and creative writing. Two examples of activities that the ICT coordinator had used with her class were Sound On, Vision Off (where pupils would turn off the screen and listen to the start of a film to try and deduce the genre) and exploring the effect of different camera angles when studying Roald Dahl's *Matilda*, transferring this to their creative writing in their descriptions of movement.

Teachers identified the importance of developing a "unified approach and language" in film across the school, so that pupils can recognise the terms and build on their learning as they move up through the school.

In year two, the focus for the teaching and learning was on developing curriculum-based film making, using green screens and animation in thematic units about Fair Trade and the Vikings. For this, the first stage was setting up morning activities where pupils could practice using the iPad in groups. As one teacher said: "[Their films] were a mess at the beginning, but it was an opportunity for them to try out different things as part of the process. As they were trying things out, they were developing their skills – so once it came to making a proper film, they knew how to do it." The teacher then modelled using the green screen and animation on the tablets before tasking pupils to create their own films. She described how, the second time around, the progress was clear, with pupils at the beginning already thinking ahead about the music and sound effects they would be using. In addition to supporting pupil progress in language and literacy, ICT and The World Around Us, key aspects of this process were developing pupils' skills in working in mixed ability groups and understanding the different roles within a group.

Having had this learning process modelled to them by the participating teachers, and in particular the ICT coordinator, other staff are now planning to build on:

- film making using green screen and animation
- developing pupils' literacy and language in analysing and understanding the text and other media they encounter
- learning and creating through group work for cross-curricular and cross-phase teaching and learning

Strategies for overcoming barriers to learning

Staff view learning through film and film making as a valuable opportunity for overcoming barriers and enhancing learning opportunities for pupils who are experiencing disadvantage, including those with special educational needs, with English as an additional language, with poor skill levels in core subjects and looked-after children. The film leader observed that film making is a positive medium of expression because it enables pupils who find it difficult to articulate their thinking in confident and incisive ways in other circumstances, most notably for those on the autistic spectrum. The use of group work and being able to visually represent what they have learned helps to generate a sense of achievement in learners who do not excel in other areas of the curriculum.

The school also identifies films and film making as stimuli for learning, and creating opportunities to accelerate progress for pupils with lower skill levels in literacy, both in reading and writing. Teachers discussed how they were already using or planning to use films in place of books or poems as a medium that is more accessible to pupils who struggle with reading – for example, in understanding setting and character – and how they can then transfer their learning back to texts. The film leader had seen this illustrated when working with a class of P6 pupils on a project about Living on the Coast, where they had studied the book *Dead Man's Cove*.

“I really enjoyed writing scripts and being a director – it was a lot of fun!”

P6 pupil

She noted that, having learned through studying film, that every character included in a scene would be there for a reason, the class was able to follow more sophisticated clues about the roles of different characters in the story. Film making is also used as a way of helping pupils to stimulate ideas for writing. The film leader observed that pupils were more confident in discussing their ideas and leading in group work when on camera, having removed “the shackles of having to write their ideas down”.

Quality arts experiences for learners experiencing disadvantage

Ballycastle, where the school is situated, does not have its own local cinema. The closest cinema is in a town 30 miles away. Teachers observed that because of this pupils have to persuade their parents when they want to see a film and have to feel more invested in the experience: “Their current menu is just blockbuster [films].” The school is therefore using the approach of learning through film as an opportunity to expose pupils to new genres or more unusual films, which they would not have chosen to watch themselves. This includes showings of older films, and through this, developing pupils’ understanding of advances in special effects and technology. For example, one P5 class compared two versions of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (the 1971 *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* and the 2005 remake) to reflect on how and why the stories were different, and the role of special effects in this.

Use of learning resources

As part of their participation in Full Steam Ahead, the school was provided with a bank of learning resources for learning through film. This included planning documents and worksheets to use in class – for example, a worksheet showing the same picture from different camera angles, asking pupils to comment on what particular angles made them think of or the mood or feeling they created. There was also a Parent Pack to encourage pupils to develop their film literacy and film making skills away from school. The head teacher feels that teachers had been well-prepared by these resources, and that they were easy for teachers to use. Into Film also provided the teachers with additional resources for film making, including two iPads and a green screen. The film leader feels that having these resources in school means that staff will now be more willing to try them out.

The school is now moving towards sourcing and developing its own bank of film learning resources. For example, the film leader used Literacy Shed, an online directory of short films, to show her class *The Lighthouse* animation, to support their topic on light and electricity.

Leading and embedding learning through the arts

School vision and values

According to the school leader, the project has had a significant impact in enhancing the attainment of all pupils involved, including their progress in literacy, numeracy and ICT. This, he feels, will encourage wider school stakeholders, including the Board of Governors, to support learning through film as a cross-curricular programme. The school is planning to fully implement the learning through film approach in its School Development Plan for 2018–21. Subject coordinators are responsible for elements of the plan relating to their curriculum area. The film leader, who is also the coordinator for ICT, plans to incorporate film making into ICT, as well as working with the literacy coordinator to embed this alongside film literacy and using the three Cs and three Ss.

Teachers described their vision of success for their pupils in learning through the arts as:

“Instead of being given a particular resource and told to use it, pupils will themselves seek out opportunities to use film and film making in lessons. They will see the benefits of film and use it to support their own learning – and we will have the facilities there in each classroom for them to use.”

Head teacher

“Film is being used almost as much as books ... The whole school is using film, finding out what works for different topics, and building film into the curriculum for different year groups.”

P6 teacher

“Film is something which excites everybody ... Pupils are being introduced to film in P1, so that by the time they get to P7, they are making their own films – progressing in film as they progress through the school.”

P1 teacher

Moving forwards, the school is confident in its vision to broaden the reach of learning through film to different year groups and areas of the curriculum, and to create a sense of progression in how they are using film as they move through the school: “Teachers are good at making space within the curriculum to do this.”



Pupils watch and analyse films to improve their literacy skills. Photo: Into Film.

Teacher leadership and ownership of learning through the arts

The school's most recent inspection report describes a key feature of its outstanding leadership as: "[the head teacher's] commitment to developing staff in their leadership roles through, for example, school-based development programmes which draw upon the latest educational research and inform teaching approaches and improve further the quality of teaching and learning. The coordinators are knowledgeable about their areas of responsibility and are committed to continuing improvement of the provision." While this inspection was carried out before the school's participation in Full Steam Ahead, the way it has embraced the development of the ICT coordinator as 'film leader' exemplifies this approach to teacher leadership in the school.

As the ICT coordinator said: "Now that people know I'm the film leader, they will come and ask me about things they can do." Her plans for leading CPDL in learning through film at the school include setting aside three training days and/or time during weekly staff meetings in the first term to introduce staff to different aspects of film making, and building the approaches into the ICT and literacy School Development Priorities. The head teacher points to her particular strengths in disseminating her own learning to other staff. These include her ability to talk to teachers about the purpose of the approach and willingness to explore with them examples of what her pupils have achieved. There is also an appetite among other staff to take the lead in developing the use of film in the year groups they teach – for example, exploring in P1 where there might be opportunities for pupils to be introduced to film making, and the challenges this would involve.

Beyond this, the school has ambitions for teachers and pupils to take ownership of their learning through film. Inspired by the project, the school has created an anti-bullying video featuring pupils and teachers saying, "Say no to bullying!" The head teacher was enthusiastic about the difference it had made to pupils, having the message come from their own peers rather than a mass-produced video from an external company, and is keen to explore other opportunities for doing this.

Embedding learning through the arts in the primary curriculum

In an online survey as part of the project evaluation, teachers said that their school's curriculum was enabling learning through the arts in "significantly more depth" than before the project. Similarly, the head teacher said that learning through the arts was being given "much higher priority" and colleagues were devoting "much more time to" this approach. Building on the training the two participating teachers have received and then delivered in their school, teachers have identified numerous opportunities for embedding learning through film across the curriculum and across different year groups, including:

- In P1, the teacher is considering ways to use film to develop pupils' understanding of emotions and expressions, an important focus of learning in P1, and to teach them about phonics, by watching a film and observing the shapes characters make with their mouths when they speak particular words. She is also starting to think about ways that the P1 curriculum can get pupils started on their journey towards film making further up the school – for example, through taking photos (part of the new ICT curriculum) and analysing them in relation to setting and camera angles, or having a go at filming each other reading aloud in front of the green screen.

- One P3 teacher said that she was “excited” about opportunities to use film approaches in the coming year to provide a more practical approach to learning – for example, making videos of caterpillars developing into butterflies to study their lifecycles, or on school trips when learning about the coast.
- The P6 teacher and head teacher both identified the potential of film literacy and film making for delivering the ICT curriculum “in a more meaningful way”. The ICT curriculum in Northern Ireland is structured around the five Es: explore, express, evaluate, exchange and exhibit. The head teacher is enthusiastic to explore how film work can help to meet these requirements, for example, exhibiting their work in a digital format.

Understanding disadvantage and learning through the arts

As identified through the evaluation survey, enquiry tools and interviews, the forms of disadvantage experienced by pupils at the school include special educational needs, English as an additional language, difficulties in core subjects such as literacy or maths, disrupted home lives and a lack of experience of, or access to, quality art or technology. In addition to the support provided to individual pupils, the school has considered approaches to supporting vulnerable pupils in learning through film at a wider level, in particular, in relation to access and experience. The school is part of the Department of Education's Extended Schools programme, which aims to improve the levels of educational achievement for young people experiencing disadvantage by providing additional support for them to reach their full potential. As part of this, the school runs a film club every Friday night, where they screen films supplied by Into Film. The school also has art and ICT clubs, where the ICT coordinator plans to introduce film making.

Making connections

The school's most recent inspection highlighted that: “A particular feature of the outstanding practice was the use of real-life contexts to engage, motivate and challenge the children to achieve their best.” The school is keen to continue building connections with real life contexts in its use of film, including the connections pupils are making between film and their local community. The school is located close to a filming site for the television programme *Game of Thrones*. The film leader is aiming to invite back past pupils of the school – including the *Game of Thrones* actor Conleth Hill, and his brother Ronan, who is a sound engineer on the programme – to broaden pupils' horizons about the opportunities for working in film and other creative industries. Teachers are also finding opportunities to expose pupils to more films made in Northern Ireland, such as the film *The Christmas Wish*, which they had shown the previous December. One teacher said how much pupils had enjoyed seeing this portrayal of Christmas “like it is here”.

The school has identified opportunities for engaging parents and carers in their children's learning through film from the very start of their interactions with the school. At the end of each year, the parents of the next year's P1 class are invited into the school for an introductory meeting with the class teacher. For the meeting this year, the P1 teacher had created a film of the current pupils in her class, talking about what they had enjoyed about being in P1, which she had shown to the parents. Further up the school, teachers are looking for additional opportunities to invite parents to the school for showing films their children have made and to celebrate their achievements. The Parent Pack provided by Into Film, which includes guidance for making your own film and prompt cards for discussing the three Cs and three Ss while watching films at home, further encourages parents to engage with their children's learning and to make it a part of their home lives.

Where next?

The school's key priorities for sustaining and further developing their learning are:

- **Disseminating the participating teachers' learning through the school:** The ICT coordinator has already planned to use three of the training days/weekly planning meetings to introduce new aspects of film making to staff.
- **Developing a consistent, structured approach to the use of film making technology:** The ICT coordinator will set up an iTunes account to investigate programmes and applications that could be used for film making, and install these on the iPads provided. This should also help teachers to become familiar with the software and techniques.
- **Planning pupil progression for learning through film and film making:** The head teacher's vision is for pupils to develop different skills as they move through the school, just as they would in literacy or maths. Consequently, there needs to be a structure in place so that teachers understand what pupils are learning in each year and how their own teaching fits into this.

Further reading

Case Study: Burry Port Community Primary School/Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Porth Tywyn, Listening to Language/Cerdd Iaith (Burry Port, Wales)

This study examines how the TDF has enabled a middle leader and colleagues to study and create a rich blend of music, language, technology, maths and more. The full case study is at phf.org.uk/TDF/BurryPort.

Case Study: Heathfield Primary School, Art of Learning (South Ayrshire, Scotland)

This study examines the role of school leaders in using Art of Learning based approaches to extend and enhance the curriculum, to develop pupils' executive function and to encourage creativity and collaboration. The full case study is at phf.org.uk/TDF/Heathfield.

Case Study: Hotspur Primary School, Concordia (Newcastle, England)

This study examines the way a school can connect the arts and each pupil's emotional development and wellbeing to develop confidence and resilience, and to enable highly differentiated choices about how to engage pupils experiencing disadvantage with the arts in response to individual needs. The full case study is at phf.org.uk/TDF/Hotspur.

Teacher Development Fund: Year one pilot evaluation

Read the report:
phf.org.uk/TDF/YearOnePilotEvaluation.

Teacher Development Fund pilot programme 2016–18 evaluation

Read the report:
phf.org.uk/TDF/PilotProgrammeEvaluation.

Learn more about the Fund at phf.org.uk/funds/tdf.

For details on application deadlines, contact ela@phf.org.uk.

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Paul Hamlyn Foundation
5–11 Leake Street
London WC1X 9HY

Tel 020 7812 3300
Fax 020 7812 3310
information@phf.org.uk
www.phf.org.uk
@phf_uk
#PHFTDF

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