OFF-GRID SHAKESPEARE

PROJECT REPORT







EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Off-Grid Shakespeare was designed to offer our workshops, at a subsidised cost, in rural areas, to schools that aren't normally able, due to size and location, to take part in our annual Theatre Festival. Our aim with the project was to improve vital life skills, including confidence, teamwork, and communication, whilst also spreading cultural capital among pupils who may not otherwise have easy access to the arts and may not encounter Shakespeare until secondary school.

The project ran between 2021 and 2023 with seven rural primary schools taking part in North Yorkshire and Lancashire. We delivered the project over two tranches, taking learnings from Tranche A to improve the project delivery of Tranche B.

WE DELIVERED:

- 47 student workshops to 432 students
- Led 17 CPD (Continuing Professional Development) sessions to 56 teachers
- Collaborated with four local artistic companies who delivered 15 additional workshops
- Young people from the schools performed to a combined audience of 625 family, friends and peers.

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"The whole experience was fantastic from start to finish. The facilitators were utterly fabulous - their knowledge, passion and enthusiasm were infectious, and they worked well with us to achieve very strong outcomes for our children. We feel lucky to have been part of the project."

- Charity, Head Teacher, The Boyle and Petyt Primary School

CORAM SHAKESPEARE SCHOOLS FOUNDATION



"O THIS LEARNING, WHAT A THING IT IS!"

- THE TAMING OF THE SHREW (ACT I, SCENE 2)

Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation is a cultural education charity that gives young people across the UK the confidence to succeed in life. Our mission is to promote life skills, social cohesion and ambition, higher educational attainment (especially in literacy, oracy, and the performing arts) and provide a unique cultural and creative experience for young people from a broad range of backgrounds.

Off-Grid Shakespeare is a brand new project which brings Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation's life-changing work to primary schools in rural areas of the UK. Over four academic years, Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation has worked in residence at seven primary schools in North Yorkshire and Lancashire as they rose to the challenge of teaching and performing a Shakespeare play. Through a combination of student workshops and teacher training, Shakespeare has been brought to life in the classroom, and creative teaching practice extended across the curriculum.





Off-Grid Shakespeare was specifically designed to offer schools that aren't usually able, due to size and location, to take part in our programmes and was made possible with funding from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The programme was devised in 2019 in response to the fact that young people in rural areas are less likely to engage with the arts than their peers from urban environments. Rural areas of the UK are also less likely to receive funding for arts activities. Arts Council England (ACE) investment reports and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) Taking Part Survey demonstrate 'cold spots' of public arts funding are matched by low overall engagement by local communities.

Studies at the time showed that there was a clear link between taking part in arts activities at school and increased aspirations, academic achievement and life chances. The Cultural Learning Alliance's 2017 ImagineNation study reported that young people from low-income households are three times more likely to continue to higher education and get a degree, twice as likely to volunteer, and 20% more likely to vote if they have taken part in arts activities at school.

Despite these outcomes, arts in the education were increasingly in decline across the UK due to school funding pressure, teacher capacity and skillset, and the national focus on STEM subjects. Cuts to arts education were also disproportionately affecting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Department for Education and DCMS reports confirmed this picture, and included many areas classified as rural, where economic downturns have been particularly evident.

We felt that there was a clear need for and high potential for a positive impact from opportunities Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation could provide for young people in rural areas. Off-Grid Shakespeare would overcome the barrier of being too far away from a theatre, a key element of the traditional Theatre Festival model, and allow us to work in a bespoke way with the schools involved - collaborating with teaching staff to embed a legacy of our pedagogy.





TRANCHE A

Tranche A saw us work with four schools in West Yorkshire: Sutton in Craven CofE Primary, Thornton in Craven CofE Primary, Cowling Community Primary and Kildwick CofE Primary. Working closely with the schools over two academic years we ran to the following timetable:



TRANCHE A TIMETABLE

WORKSHOP TYPE	TERM
1 x CPD to introduce the project	Spring / Summer 2021
3 x In-School Workshop with Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation focusing on exploring a Shakespearean text.	Summer 2021
$1\mathrm{x}$ In-School performance sharing to an audience of parents / guardians, peers and local community	Summer 2021
1 x CPD to explore using creative approaches to teaching across the curriculum.	Autumn 2021
3 x In-School Workshops with Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation to support rehearsals for summer performance.	Spring / Summer 2022
1 x CPD day for the Teacher-Director to equip them with the skills and tools to produce their summer performance.	Spring 2022
2 x Workshops with local artists, (Naseem Darbey of Keighley Creative, Falling Stars Theatre Company and Lempen Puppet Theatre Company), to support production elements of the final performances.	Spring / Summer 2022
Final performance at Fells Theatre, South Craven Secondary School.	Summer 2022

TRANCHE B

Tranche B saw us work with three schools in North Yorkshire and Lancashire; Embsay CofE Primary School, The Boyle and Petyt Primary School, and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School. We adapted the timetable for the delivery of the project to best suit the schools involved whilst also responding to feedback from Tranche A. For Tranche B we ran to the following adapted timetable:



TRANCHE B TIMETABLE

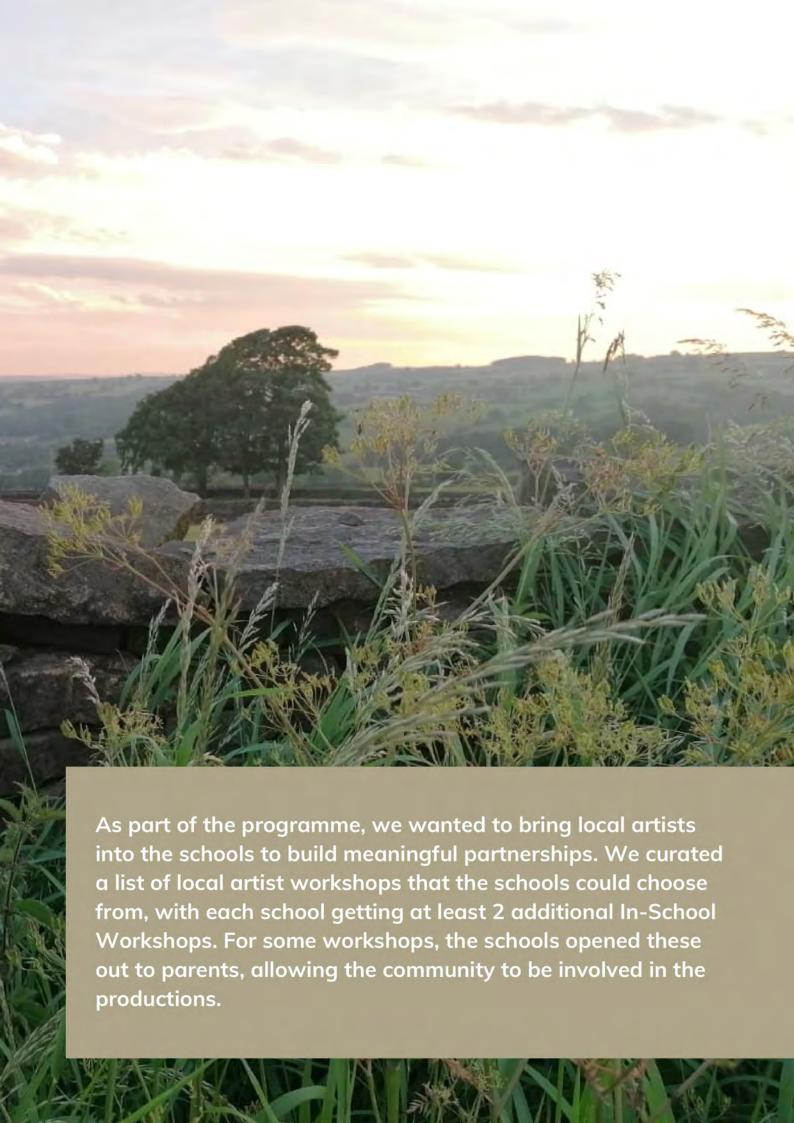
WORKSHOP TYPE	TERM
1 x CPD to introduce the project	Autumn 2022
3 x In-School Workshops with Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation focusing on exploring a Shakespearean text.	Autumn / Spring 2022
1 x In-School performance sharing to an audience of parents/guardians, peers and local community	Autumn / Spring 2022/23
1 x CPD focused on using creative approaches to teaching within the English Curriculum.	Autumn / Spring 2022/23
5 x In-School Workshop with Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation, introducing our pedagogy and approach to Shakespeare.	Spring 2023
3 x In-School Workshops with Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation to support rehearsals for summer performance.	Spring / Summer 2023
2 x Workshops with local artists, (Naseem Darbey of Keighley Creative and The Music Box), to support production elements of the final performances.	Summer 2023
Final performance at Fells Theatre, South Craven Secondary School.	Summer 2023
1 x CPD to explore using creative approaches to teaching across the curriculum	Autumn 2023

IN BOTH TRANCHE A AND B SCHOOLS WERE GIVEN THE SAME RESOURCES, INPUT AND SUPPORT FROM CORAM SHAKESPEARE SCHOOLS FOUNDATION WHICH INCLUDED:

- Bespoke student workshops, introducing the school to our pedagogy whilst promoting confidence, collaboration and creativity.
- At least two whole school CPD sessions focusing on boosting creative approaches to teaching across English and the wider curriculum.
- Specialised Teacher-Director CPD, equipping one to two teachers from each school with the tools to direct and produce their own unique interpretation of a Shakespeare play.
- Written-up toolkits after each CPD session packed with resources, exercises and schemes of work to take into their teaching practice.
- Creative Consultations with the CSSF Project Manager for the Teacher-Directors to focus on specific challenges that schools were facing in developing their adaptations of Shakespeare plays.
- Support from CSSF to work with local artists on their final performance.







NASEEM DARBEY OF KEIGHLEY CREATIVE

Naseem is an artist and studio-holder at Keighley Creative. She creates large-scale sculpture and installations from her studio and tours them. Alongside her work as an artist, she writes and delivers audience participation projects for education and consultation.

Keighley Creative are dedicated to providing the local community with as many opportunities to flex those creative muscles as possible. To find out more information on Keighley Creative visit keighleycreative.org/whats-on.

As part of the Off-Grid Shakespeare project, Naseem worked alongside Kildwick CofE (VC) Primary School and Cowling Community Primary School in Tranche A, and alongside St Joseph's Catholic Primary School and Embsay CofE (VC) Primary School in Tranche B.



Naseem collaboratively worked with the Teacher-Directors to create and curate their initial design ideas. She then worked directly with the young people involved to make the finished products used in their final performance.

Each school she worked with was offered help with the creation of costumes, hand-held props, or small pieces of set.





LEMPEN PUPPET THEATRE COMPANY

Empero s

Lempen Puppet Theatre Company, founded in 1987, tour their own unique brand of original stories told with puppets. Imaginative, spellbinding, surprising and sometimes bonkers, Lempen productions focus on puppetry, storytelling, light, music, and a journey that takes the audience there and back again. Based in North Yorkshire, but touring nationally and internationally, Liz and Daniel Lempen are also the Artistic Directors for Skipton International Puppet Festival

For more on the Lempen Puppet Theatre Company visit <u>lempen.co.uk</u>.

Lempen Puppet Theatre Company worked with Sutton in Craven CofE Primary School in Tranche A, over a series of three workshops, to build masks to be used in their production of The Tempest. The workshops consisted of an initial consultation with the Teacher-Director to create the idea of how masks could be used within their production.

This was then followed by two In-School Workshops, the first was a mask-building workshop, equipping the young people with the practical skills to see their ideas come to life. The second was a mask-using workshop, where the young people learned to develop their mask and puppetry skills and focus on how to bring them alive.



FALLING STARS THEATRE COMPANY

Falling Stars Theatre was founded in 2014, partly in response to a plea from Fallfest (Fallfest is a three-day community festival with a focus on Film, Art, Literature and Life) to introduce a new style of theatre to this community festival audience.

Falling Stars Theatre are known for their immersive style of performance, involving the audience at the heart of the action and making them feel as if they are experiencing life with the characters. For more information on Falling Stars Theatre Company visit fallingstarstheatre.co.uk/about.

Falling Stars worked alongside
Thornton in Craven (VC) Primary
School in Tranche A, holding two
workshops with the performance
company to explore ways of creating
and developing their relationship with
the audience using immersive theatre
techniques.



The do this through a range of different techniques, including breaking down the traditional actor / audience relationship, acknowledging the audience's presence, and playing around with their role in the performance, to connect them in a more imaginative and playful way.





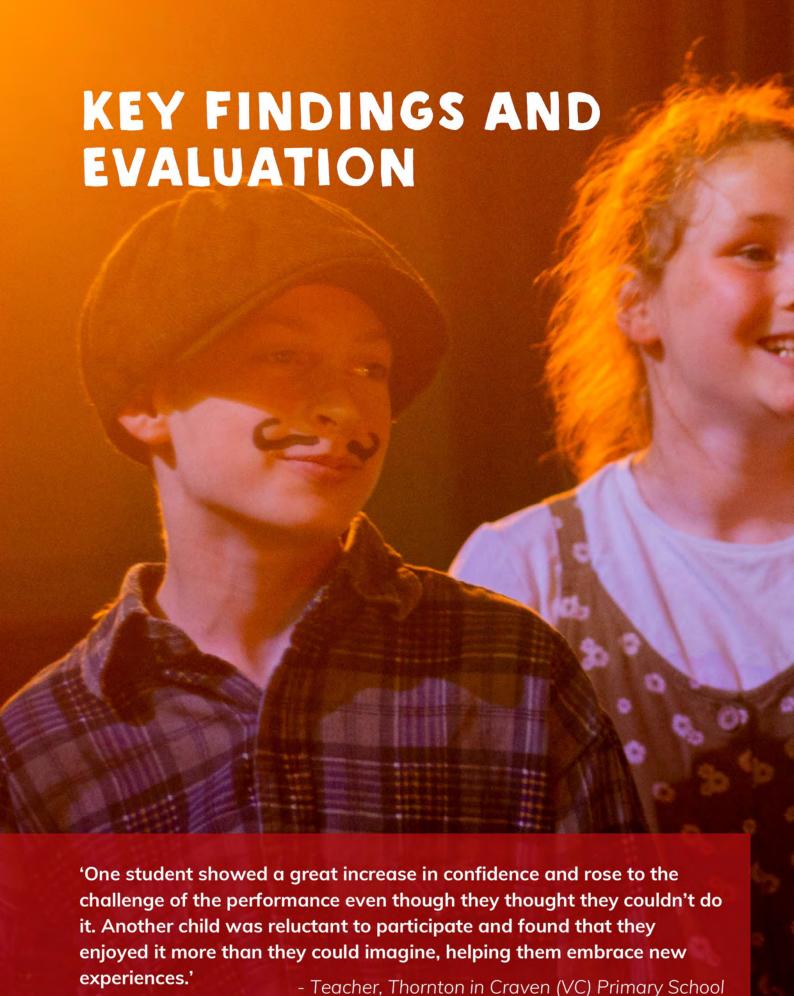


THE MUSIC BOX

The Music Box is a not-for-profit organisation based in Leeds. They run groups and activities for young people and adults such as guitar groups, DJ classes, a youth rock band project and much more. You can find out more information on The Music Box via their website: themusicbox.org.uk.

The Music Box worked with The Boyle and Petyt Primary School to write a unique song for their performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream. The class helped to write the lyrics with The Music Box then composing the music. This culminated in an excellent and incredibly catchy song with students feeling pride in being able to create and perform their own song.







TRANCHE A

At the start of the project, all four schools in Tranche A reported limited access to arts and cultural projects for their students. Leanne, a teacher from Sutton in Craven (VC) Primary School, commented on the lack of local artist involvement within the school stating that 'money is the main barrier. Due to COVID also nothing local has taken place.'

In a consultancy with members of Senior Leadership Team (SLT) from all four schools, it was noted that rebuilding confidence with pupils was one of the main reasons for the schools wishing to participate in the programme. When reflecting on the impact that COVID had had on students' school life, Anna from Thornton in Craven Primary commented that:

'The attainment gap has widened between some students, especially those with less support at home. Relearning the social rules of the school environment and being part of a wider group again has been a challenge for some'.

We carried out a baseline evaluation with the students to get an understanding of their feelings about returning to school post-pandemic. From this it was clear that the return to school had had a significant impact upon the social aspects of school life.

When asked: 'What have you enjoyed most about being in school since coming back after learning at home during the lockdowns?'

56%

responded 'seeing my friends.'

We asked the young people: 'What have you found most challenging about being in school since coming back after learning at home during the lockdowns?'

唱1%

responded with comments around 'extra work / getting more work' and having to 'work hard.'

50%

of the lead teachers involved in Tranche A commented on how they hoped the young people involved would gain confidence from the project.

During Tranche A, we worked closely with the schools, with CPD sessions focusing on using creative approaches to the curriculum, equipping the Teacher-Directors of the summer performances with the skills to direct their own unique Shakespearean production. We provided teachers with toolkits to use alongside these sessions. Designed to be an extension of the CPD, these had exercises written up along with suggestions about how to utilise these exercises within their teaching practice across the curriculum.

We led exercises such as
Grandmother's Footsteps, a simple
playground game with which young
people would be familiar with. We
expanded this to focus on the topic of
Habitats from the Science Curriculum,
modelling how to build easily on a
well-known game to make it
applicable to use for any element of
learning that requires identifying key
attributes.

This could be in science, looking at materials, or planets, life cycles, etc. but could also be an interesting way to tell elements of stories and identify key features of real life or fictitious characters in English or humanities subjects.



After the delivery of this CPD a teacher commented that they had gained 'creativity and encouragement ideas for activities to enhance teaching' and

100%

of teachers agreed that they had learnt new skills to make their teaching more effective.

80%

of teachers strongly agreed that they were more likely to incorporate creative approaches into their teaching practice.



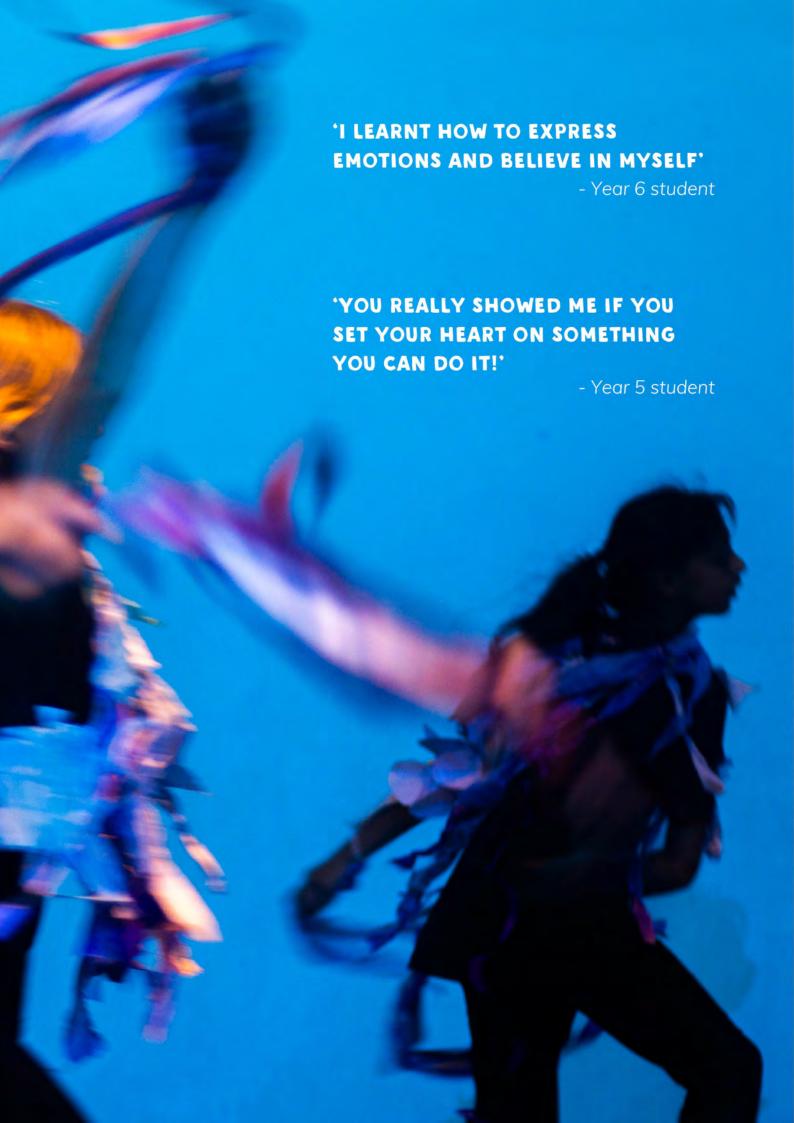
The CPD ahead of the final summer performances was open to the Teacher-Director and one other member of staff from each school, and took place at South Craven Secondary School. By opening this up to two members of staff from each school we hoped to build wider support for the Teacher-Director from the whole school.

We worked closely to support each school through the rehearsal process, with facilitators delivering In-School Workshops in collaboration with the Teacher-Directors. This process culminated in a fantastic celebration of creativity, with each school rising to the challenge of producing their own Shakespeare play.

At the end of Tranche A

100%

of teachers strongly agreed that their students were more confident as a result of the project. When asked about one thing that the young people had learned from being part of the project one young person commented, 'I have learnt that I am more confident and brave', whilst another commented, 'I know I improved my confidence a lot more.'



FINDINGS FROM TRANCHE A

After the delivery of Tranche A, we held a mid-project review, evaluating what had worked well and what could be remodelled for the delivery of Tranche B. We did this by:

- Changing the structure of the whole school CPD sessions.
 We reflected that whilst ending the project with the
 summer performances was a wonderful crescendo, we
 wanted to adapt the project timetable to end on a CPD
 session. We felt that this would enable us to provide a
 more meaningful legacy of our pedagogy within the
 schools. We landed on creating two whole-school CPD
 sessions that would frame the delivery of the project. The
 first would be on using creative approaches within
 English and the second would mark the end of the project
 and would see us expand to using creative approaches
 across the wider curriculum.
- Providing the school with the option to involve other classes, other than the final performance class, in both the local artist workshops and the initial series of workshops. We felt this would be a way to have meaningful whole school investment in the project and would provide more internal support for the Teacher-Director.
- Providing additional support to allow for two teachers to attend the Teacher-Director CPD session. Through our close work with Tranche A, we saw how tightly stretched resources were in schools and how difficult it was for the SLT to release members of staff to attend our full-day CPD. As a result, for Tranche B we offered schools financial support to pay for the cost of a supply teacher to cover one teacher attending this CPD session.





TRANCHE B

Due to outreach challenges in Tranche B, we created project timetables that were responsive to each school's calendar. This meant that the schools started the project at different points in the academic year with all three schools coming together for their summer performances. In light of our learnings from Tranche A we increased the amount of young people that could be involved in different aspects of the delivery. This led to one school having Years 3 to 6 involved in the final performance and others involving other classes in the local artist workshops and initial workshops.

The schools were also given the option of parental involvement in the local artist workshops, so that the whole community could feel a sense of involvement and pride in the final summer performance.

At the start of Tranche B teachers hoped that students would gain the following from being involved in the project:

'Confidence, feeling proud, a sense of community and discover new skills.'

'Come together as an ensemble. Take pride and ownership of their play. Stretch their creativity and imaginations.'

Like Tranche A,



of students in Tranche B
commented that they were most
looking forward to 'working with their
friends' as part of the project.

After completion of the project, when asked about what they had most enjoyed about rehearsing and performing a play young people commented that:

- 'IT GAVE ME CONFIDENCE'
- 'I LEARNT I HAVE CONFIDENCE'



We adapted and redevised the content of the CPD sessions, with the first session focusing on creativity within English. We framed this session around a four-step experiential approach to English:

- Stimulus A way of beginning to introduce the theme and the central ideas to their young people, to spark their imaginations and curiosities.
- Exploration A way of building a deeper engagement in the topic and generating ideas, vocabulary and written outcomes both as an individual and as a whole class.
- Written outcome An individual writing task that has been developed with a creative framing.
- Presentation A creative and practical way of young people sharing back their work beyond reading out what they have written.

After the delivery,

100%

of teachers **strongly agreed** with the statement 'I am now more likely to incorporate creative approaches within my teaching practice.' A teacher from St Joseph's Catholic Primary School reflected that 'the activities are easy to plan and implement. Great for starting and evaluation.'

At the start of the final CPD, which expanded the creative approach to the whole curriculum, we asked the participants about the impact of the Off-Grid Shakespeare project in school:

'I'd hoped for our children to gain confidence, new skills, an appreciation of Shakespeare - and how it can be fun after all! I wanted my children to find self-belief and a passion for performance; to feel proud and to find their voices. I also wanted them to see their creativity can manifest in many forms - be that acting, stage direction, props or technical prowess.

I can honestly say we achieved this tenfold. It was amazing. Exhausting at times, but amazing. The skills we learned through the CPD were also fantastic and certainly helped support learning across the curriculum. I would wholly advocate this programme to anyone who asked.'

- Julia, Year 6 Teacher, Embsay Primary School

Q&A

Interview with Hannah from St Joseph's Catholic Primary School. Hannah is a Teacher from St Joseph's Catholic Primary School; she co-led the Off-Grid Shakespeare project in Tranche B. We interviewed Hannah midway through the programme after the initial In-School Workshops and the first CPD session.



WHAT EXERCISES HAVE YOU BEEN DOING IN CLASS WITH YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE THAT YOU HAD LEARNT IN THE CPD?

For this Macbeth writing we did an [exercise] on setting descriptions so we went to the heath, we listened to music using the advice from the CPD [and] used post-it notes around the classroom with setting descriptions, and in pairs they explored the space. That led to a witch coming into class; they then hot seated the witch and then they wrote some lovely setting descriptions from that. They like the [character] actions [exercise], so in other lessons like science we've made actions for different [topic] vocabulary and that's been really useful for vocabulary and new words.



HOW HAVE YOUR CLASS BENEFITTED FROM THE OFF-GRID PROGRAMME SO FAR?

In terms of confidence lots of children who wouldn't normally do acting outside of school have been given the opportunity to develop their confidence and have a go at drama, not only in the afternoons with [the facilitators] but also in class we've incorporated [exercises] into English and different units to make our lessons more exciting.

WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED SO FAR AND WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO IN THE NEXT STAGE OF THE PROJECT?

I'm excited for the young people to have more opportunities be confident and a lot of our children have never been to a theatre or been on an actual stage so that opportunity for their personal development and enhancement is brilliant. The facilitators have been wonderful at getting out confidence in some people, and facilitating for particular SEN Children – it's been very inclusive.

LAURA'S STORY

Laura is a Year 6 teacher and the English Lead at Thornton in Craven Primary School. She was involved in Tranche A of the Off-Grid programme, joining at the start of the second phase of the CPD sessions centred on embedding creativity across the curriculum. Her class performed Much Ado About Nothing in July 2022 to celebrate the culmination of the programme. Since joining the programme Laura has found the confidence to use creative teaching tools across the

"The Off-Grid programme has opened up opportunities to myself and my students that I wouldn't have been confident in taking before"

curriculum. She has been using the exercises from toolkits provided in conjunction with the CPD sessions, allowing her to implement different approaches to teaching that she hadn't previously used. To start her rehearsal process Laura led an exercise called a 'Whoosh' with her young people to introduce the story of Much Ado About Nothing. She found that her students were actively engaged in the exercise, enjoying the

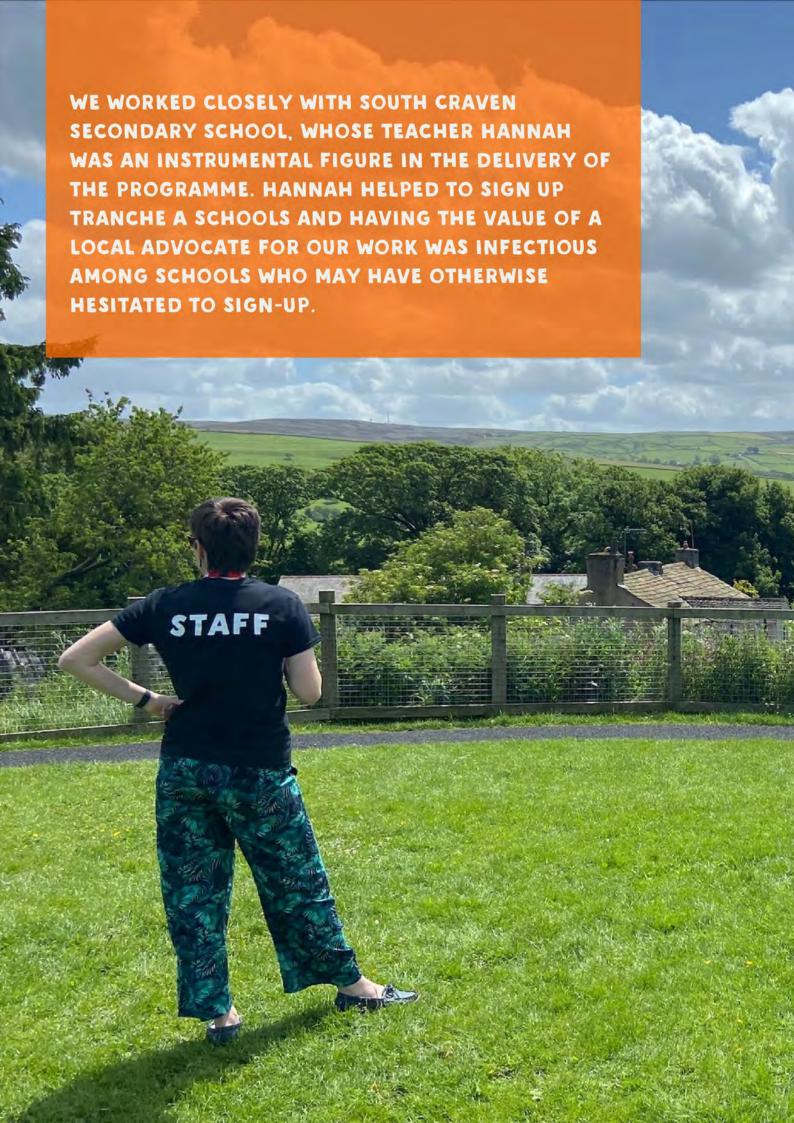
experience and making discoveries about the characters. Through her training at the CPD sessions she had

"It could have been overwhelming to introduce the Shakespearean characters, but it was so accessible for them"

the confidence to expand and adapt the exercise. Some members of her class are still talking about the exercise and quoting the lines they learnt! Laura's class performed their own unique interpretation of Much Ado About Nothing at the Fells Theatre, South Craven School in summer 2022. Their production took ownership of the story, and of the stage they performed on. From the first scene, in which the ensemble creating a bustling market,

"It's amazing to allow them to explore performing at South Craven"

to the wedding scene and dance finale, the young people stamped their personality on the play.





FEEDBACK FROM HANNAH

6 Phrases relating to the bard being 'for everyone' and 'universal' have been bandied around for generations and are certainly true; what an honour it was to see this proven by CSSF and, specifically, the Off-Grid project. Great theatre, certainly canonical theatre, is often restricted to London, Stratford and perhaps Bristol or similar cities, and rural Yorkshire can miss out. The Off-Grid project was a gift to the seven schools involved. The amount of facilitator involvement and CPD was second-to-none, and the confidence of students, including those with SEND, and staff grew in equal measure throughout.

As primarily an observer, I was delighted by every fairy, witch, king and romantic lover that stepped onto the Fells stage – who doesn't want the guards of Messina to be Roman centurions, or Bottom's donkey to appear as if from outer space?! The Off-Grid project will be missed in our area – the productions were a first not only for their casts but a number of their directors and, almost certainly, a vast swathe of their audiences.

CHALLENGES AND LEARNING

The main challenges that Off-Grid Shakespeare presented were outreach and the culture in schools during and after the COVID pandemic. We struggled to sign schools up for Tranche B with the key barriers for prospective involvement being lack of budget, the cost of living crisis, time and an internal focus on 'catch-up curriculum.' Schools were focusing on rebuilding post-COVID and finding that there were a lot of internal and external pressures on them.

As a result of this we offered schools payment plan options, reducing the financial strain on the schools. We adapted delivery models, tailoring them specifically to the schools' calendar pressures, to allow them to join the project at a point in their calendar year that worked for them.

After the completion of Tranche A, we reflected on how successful the student workshops had been, with evaluation backing this up. We felt that we needed to improve in

Tranche B on the CPD model to allow for a more meaningful legacy of creative teaching tools within the schools involved. In Tranche A we ended the project for the schools with the summer performance. The CPD sessions for the teachers ended in May and we reflected that this structure didn't best allow for the teachers to implement what they had learnt into their long-term planning.

We restructured the programme for the second Tranche so that we had three touch points with the teachers, with the programme itself ending on a final whole school CPD. This structure allowed for a more meaningful end to the project, where, collectively, the teaching staff could reflect on the achievements of the previous academic year, and used dedicated time to plan for the implementation of tools into their long-term planning for the current and forthcoming academic years.







This project was made possible by funding from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. We would like to thank them for their support of the project.

We would like to thank Hannah and South Craven School for their support in recruiting the schools and the delivery of the programme.

We would also like to thank the local artists who were involved in the programme: Naseem Darbey and Ted Pedley of Keighley Creative, The Music Box, Lempen Puppet Theatre Company and Falling Stars Theatre Company.



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