Creative Writing in Schools

Executive Summary – February 2019

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Executive Summary: Creative Writing in Schools

Arts Council England committed in 2015 to funding a £1.2m, three-year programme called Creative Writing in Schools ('CWiS'). The programme was developed in response to concerns around a perceived lack of high-quality creative writing opportunities for pupils within the curriculum, and the potential impact that this might have on children and young people's cultural education in the short-term, and creativity in the long term. The programme targeted areas of high deprivation and low arts engagement identified by Arts Council England, and involved activities focused primarily on pupils between eight and 14 years of age.

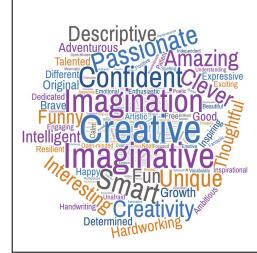
The programme was put out to tender, and funding was awarded to two organisations: **First Story** and Bath Spa University's **Paper Nations**. Nearly 3,000 children and young people, teachers and writers in over 120 schools across England participated in CWiS activities, during the 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years. Approximately a third of the young people involved were eligible for Pupil Premium funding.¹

Paper Nations and First Story appointed the education and youth think-and-action tank, **LKMco**, as an independent evaluator, and LKMco initially conducted a literature review designed to explore how schools engage with creative writing, and the key barriers to this.² The literature review informed this evaluation's design, including its key outcome measures and research tools.

As a result, CWiS activities by First Story and Paper Nations were evaluated in terms of their impact on:

- The sustainability of creative writing in schools;
- Engagement among pupils, teachers and writers with creative writing;
- **Best practice** in the teaching of creative writing;
- Building networks that support creative writing in schools, and:
- The **value** children, young people and their teachers place on creative writing.

CWiS programmes and activities have provided case studies of good practice and resources, and the evaluation highlights broader guiding principles, to improve and increase access to creative writing in schools in future.



'Write three words that describe a good writer': young people's responses to CWiS survey question (n=895).

Summary of key findings

1) Young people and teachers valued writing for the pleasure it gave, rather than for its benefits in terms of improving technical accuracy (although these were also noted). This contributed to young people feeling overwhelmingly positive about creative writing, as our case study about Paper Nations' Writing Ambassadors programme indicates.

"It's not about being right or wrong, it's just about picking up a pen and enjoying the experience and engaging with the experience."

Paper Nations Writing Champion

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¹ These figures are based upon demographic data about pupils supplied by teachers in CWiS surveys.

² Eleanor Bernardes and Loic Menzies (2016) *Creative Writing in Schools: Literature Review,* available from: https://www.lkmco.org/can-develop-creative-writing-schools/

In future, this evaluation recommends that creative writing programmes for children should mirror Paper Nations' and First Story's focus on idea formulation and exploration, over technical accuracy.

2) Young people writing less often than their peers at the beginning of CWiS wrote more often by the end of their involvement.

In future schools should proactively select pupils with little prior involvement or interest in creative writing for future activities and programmes (alongside pupils with higher levels of prior interest and engagement).

3) Creative writing networks played a vital role in bringing writers and schools together, and helping writers share knowledge, resources and opportunities. Cost and time are the biggest barriers to creative writing partnerships. So too is a lack of coordination among writers, which can mean some are not sure what their financial value is. This results in writers working for nothing, or too cheaply, putting downward pressure on many writers' wages.

"No one knows how much a writer is worth, you know. They really don't. They don't know whether it's worth £10 an hour or £100 an hour, and wildly differing payments are made."

An amozing author Sue,
In the world there's only a few,
An author, a leaster, andmozing poor,
Always gives a good lesson
And I knank you for that.

Oross is green, the sky is blue,
and get the lessons were a
rainbow, my crazy friends beside
me with a great positive
atmosphere.

Poem about the Writer-in-Residence workshops, written by a secondary school pupil

Representative from a writing organisation

Networks can help tackle these burdens by offering schools and writers support, resources and brokerage. They can help writers share employment and funding opportunities, and clarify what writers should charge.

In future, this evaluation recommends that creative writing networks and organisations should learn from First Story and Paper Nations' good practice in supporting clear expectations (including around pay) between writers and schools, and sharing of teaching resources to reduce the time required to plan activities. Networks and organisations should discourage writers from

working too cheaply or for free, and raise awareness among writers about the existing networks that can offer professional support.

4) CWiS programmes and activities helped many pupils feel more confident as writers, and in life. They found working with professional writers particularly valuable:

"[The writer] doesn't stop us from doing anything.... She'll let us try it, even if she knows it won't work out that well. ... Then she'll let us learn from our mistakes and do it [ourselves] but also be there to support us."

Young person during a focus group

Teachers also highlighted the way creative writing boosted pupils' confidence, both as writers, and in schools, as our case study of First Story's Writer-in-Residence programme shows:



Drawing of a writer by a primary school pupil.

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"The group have come on leaps and bounds with their creative writing and have found a fantastic outlet for their emotions and ideas."

Teacher involved in First Story

In future, this evaluation recommends that programmes and activities supporting creative writing in schools should build on the elements of CWiS programmes and activities that young people and practitioners identified as most valuable, including: opportunities to work with professional writers; a focus on ideas generation and exploration, and; the careful scaffolding of written tasks.

5) Many teachers' enjoyment of creative writing increased during CWiS, and teachers said that activities had increased their confidence as writers (although, generally, it was teachers who felt initially confident teaching creative writing that reported feeling more confident by the end of a programme or activity). Teachers and writers also felt their repertoire of ideas for teaching creative writing grew, and some went on to share ideas and practice with colleagues:

"[Paper Nations] has opened up networks of influence, and models of practice, which I/we can use. It has taught me lots of exciting activities and made new opportunities."

Writer involved in Paper Nations

Organisations supporting creative writers and creative writing in schools should make engaging with and supporting less confident teachers and writers a priority for future work, and enable young people and teachers to participate in the creative writing side-by-side where possible, focusing on writing for the sake of it over and above technical accuracy.



This report was written by the education and youth development 'think and action tank' LKMco. LKMco is a social enterprise - we believe that society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood.

We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

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Society should ensure that all young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood

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