

Arts Award & Music Education Hubs

investing in Reading's children through the arts



Image: Readipop

Between May 2017 and February 2018, just over 700 children aged 5-11 took part in a project that connected them to the Music Education Hub in Reading, while allowing them to work towards an Arts Award Discover certificate. The project exceeded its aim, with 456 of the children completing the Award. We spoke to Gavin Lombos, Creative Director of Readipop, about the project.

The People

- Readipop
- Berkshire Maestros
- Berkshire Cultural Education Partnership
- OxYouth
- Sonning Common Primary School
- Stoke Row Primary School
- Brookside Primary School
- Wilson Primary School
- Ewelme Primary School
- Meadow Park Primary School
- New Christchurch Primary School
- St Mary's Primary School
- Cholsey Primary School

- Whitchurch Primary School
- Allsaints Juniors School
- Woodcote Primary School
- Thameside Primary School
- St Edburgs Primary School
- Redlands Schools
- Emmbrook Junior
- Alfred Sutton
- Music Leaders:
 - David Stewart
 - Will Davey
 - Omari Johnson-Daley
 - Brett Gordon
 - Richard Bentley
 - Matthew Foster

Successes

As part of the project, partners and staff at the Music Education Hub were trained as Discover and Explore Arts Award advisers, an investment that means future work with Arts Award can also take place. The project allowed partners to both reconnect with existing relationships and widen engagement with schools not previously involved. "It really gave us an opportunity to build relationships with new schools and re-engage with schools we have worked with in the past. It was very rewarding to be able to offer these workshops for a second year, as consistency of our offer has been challenging as a project-funded organisation", Gavin explains. "We have had success in new areas of Reading too. Having established relationships with some schools meant we could devote more of our time to reaching schools in areas we've found harder to access, like Whitley and Lower Caversham."

Having the opportunity to consider

different approaches to outreach work was useful too. "Bringing our leaders together to reflect on their own approach was a really beneficial experience – it allowed us to streamline our practice and up-skill new, less experienced team members", says Gavin. "The professional development sessions also provided us with plenty of insights that we were able to then share with partners like Berkshire Maestros (a Music Education Hub partner), as well as networks like the Reading Cultural Education Partnership."

Feedback from the children taking part was crucial to the project's success too. It helped Readipop to understand what had been most effective in the workshops, as well as what could be improved on for future sessions. Furthermore, Gavin says that through this feedback, they noticed "children from more diverse backgrounds who did not previously engage with music felt really empowered after their sessions". One participant, Danny, found ways of engaging with music that he hadn't thought were possible before: "I am better at rapping than singing", he told one of the Music Leaders during a session.

The children also set goals for their own future learning as an outcome of the workshops. Gavin says these ranged "a desire to take part in another music technology workshop", to more ambitious plans like "forming bands and performing live".

Challenges

"Though we were ultimately very successful with reaching schools to take part in this programme, it was still, at times, challenging", Gavin says. The biggest challenge came in the form of engaging with schools in higher areas of deprivation, he says. "Teachers in these schools have fewer resources and greater pressures on their time. We found being both



Image: Readipop

I enjoyed when we made our group song because it sounded really good.

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Matee, pupil

persistent and flexible was effective in overcoming this challenge.”

Further challenges presented themselves, including Readipop having a more limited capacity than usual at the beginning of the summer period, Gavin explains. “Workshop promotion and coordination were a bit of a challenge because of this, but we overcame it by working with partners to provide extra promotion for the workshops and for recruiting new leaders.”

In what is certainly an ongoing trend in education, Gavin also mentions increased pressure on teachers as “placing limitations on the amount of preparation they’re able to do before each session”.

Time constraints also meant that many of the older primary school students taking part weren’t able to receive their Arts Award certificates whilst still at the school, though they were thankfully able to see the process through to the end at least, so this wasn’t too much of an issue ultimately.

Learning

“This was the first time Readipop had run such a high number of Arts Award workshops featuring the use of music technology and electronic instruments”, Gavin says. “It gave us the opportunity to gather a larger amount of feedback than in previous projects, which provided



Image: Readipop

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A big thank you for the Readipop sessions – the children absolutely loved them and it's definitely something we need to do more of.

Courtenay Simpson, teacher

an excellent learning opportunity for us and our Music Leaders. The children really enjoyed the novelty aspect of some of the more 'unusual' instruments, and others found the accessibility of digital tech helped them feel creative in new ways." In the words of pupil Katie, "I've learnt how to just step forward and do it."

Feedback from the children also provided Readipop with evidence that they will be able to use to make small changes to improve their future practice. "In the past, we had prioritised bringing a representative range of equipment to workshops. Through the children's feedback, we've been able to see that the vocoder, Kaossilator Pro and Kaoss Pads are the most engaging

equipment, so we can improve by providing more of this in the future."

Also in the feedback was evidence of the children's learning processes. "Many noted improvements to their confidence and teamwork skills, and the majority were excited to have discovered a whole new way to make music", Gavin says.

Readipop's Music Leaders benefited too – from the opportunity to reflect on their own practice. "They also had the opportunity to share learning with partners and other Music Education Hubs." Readipop were then able to use feedback from Leaders and participants to further develop their Arts Award Explore resource pack.

When asked to reflect on any other improvements they might make for future projects, Gavin listed several suggestions.

"We plan to work more with partners and practitioners who have already established good relationships with those harder to reach schools. Alongside this, we want to continue to pursue fundraising that will allow us to maintain the consistency of our offer to schools."

When considering the important role teachers have to play in this work, he mentions their goals to "give teachers a longer lead-in time before sessions", so that they have better opportunities to prepare. "We will also be completing Arts Award as part of our ongoing schools engagement programme." He adds, "This means that our leaders will be able to support the Arts Award process over several weeks, to provide the best possible experience for the young people. We want to ensure teachers have a realistic expectation for the marking and certification elements of Arts Award, and will be offering advice on the best way to ensure all certificates can reach their recipient with the minimum amount of admin time."

Recommendations for Others

For those working on similar projects, Gavin has this to say: "Building participant feedback into Readipop's Arts Award resource pack has been really beneficial to us. Gathering such a large amount of feedback means we are able to really make informed changes to our delivery, and it's provided us with evidence to support funding bids in the future."

They also found designing bespoke resources to be really important. "We were able to incorporate feedback and tailor the workshops and resources so they complimented each other", he explains. "We would also highly recommend

experience-sharing as a way to develop practice, both in-house and with partners and networks. Sharing resources and creating a discourse around Arts Award delivery allowed us to share our successes and create plans for overcoming challenges."

Looking to the Future

Is there an ongoing need for this kind of work? The feedback speaks for itself, says Gavin. "It highlighted a clear need for providing a diverse range of arts activity to primary age children, to prevent them from disengaging with arts at a young age."

Projects like this provide an opportunity for practitioners to bring a broad range of artistic practices into the spotlight – much more than most schools have access to, and this means better meeting the creative needs of diverse audiences. "We plan to improve our reach by using partners to promote workshops to their own networks in the future", Gavin explains. "This is crucial for providing consistent delivery across Reading, particularly to those most in need of funded provision."

Progression Routes

Young people identified a need for progression after the funded sessions had concluded, Gavin says. "Readipop was able to secure funding to begin an open access music club for primary age pupils and their families, which will begin later this year (2018).

"As part of our ongoing schools programme, we are integrating Arts Award Explore into our 'first access delivery', through Berkshire Maestros. This progression onto the next level of Arts Award is also going to be provided through Readipop's Partnership Fund project with

