

# 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

Burry Port Community Primary School/Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Porth Tywyn, Listening to Language/Cerdd Iaith

Location: Burry Port, Wales

Project developed by British Council Wales, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the University of Wales Trinity St. David School of Education and Communities, and Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith

This study looks at how arts-based approaches to teaching and learning have encouraged teachers and school leaders to create a rich curriculum combining music, language, technology, maths and more.

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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 focuses on the way that the TDF has enabled a middle leader and colleagues at Burry Port Community Primary School to study and create a rich blend of music, language, technology, maths and more.

# Burry Port Community Primary School/Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Porth Tywyn – Cerdd Iaith/Listening to Language



Workshops encourage pupils to listen to the sounds of languages to help them develop and understand new vocabulary. Photo: Jon Pountney.

## School background and context

Burry Port Community Primary School/Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Porth Tywyn is located in a small seaside town, some five miles to the west of Llanelli, Carmarthenshire, Wales. In 2017–18, there were 210 pupils on roll, aged 3–11, of whom 31.6% are eligible for free school meals funding, well above the national average of 17%. The school currently has Flying Start facilities, which reflects the socio-economic status of the area. The majority of students are of white British heritage. Only a small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Just under 3% of pupils speak English as an additional language, and none have a Welsh language background. The school was graded as Good in its most recent Estyn school inspection in November 2014.

## Overview of the Teacher Development Fund project

From September 2016 to July 2018, Burry Port participated in the Listening to Language/Cerdd Iaith project, an arts-based creative learning project led by the British Council Wales in partnership with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBC NOW), University of Wales Trinity St. David School of Education and Communities and regional education consortium Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith, as part of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation TDF pilot. The project explored new approaches to music and language learning in primary schools in South and South West Wales to pilot a new approach to the teaching of modern foreign languages, through components of sound – such as rhyme, pitch, repetition and rhythm – embedded within music.

During its first year, the project sought to develop and test a new, music-based methodology for language teaching to help pupils learn individual words and complex sentence structures across three languages (Welsh, English and Spanish) simultaneously. In the second year, the project aimed to support schools to embed these approaches by investing in teachers' confidence to independently develop and deliver music and language lessons; positioning teachers and school leaders to support each other's learning; and developing a Digital Learning Platform to enable participating schools to share their experiences and resources online.

## Case study: Burry Port Community Primary School

Three teachers from Burry Port participated in the project: the Year 5 teacher, who was taking a lead on the project at the school; the Year 6 teacher who was also the Key Stage 2 lead; and the deputy head teacher who was also the Foundation Phase Leader and a Year 1 class teacher. The project activity was delivered across the three terms of the school year in the first year of the pilot, and the spring and summer terms in the second year. Each term encompassed a continuing professional development and learning (CPDL) session for teachers from all schools participating in the project.

In the first year, this focused on introducing participants to the lesson structures and resources. In the second year, this incorporated presentations and active workshops from specialists. Each school also received two visits per term from BBC NOW musicians and linguists, to support them in delivering music and language lessons in their classrooms.

Evidence for this case study was gathered through:

- site visit notes from a visit by a CUREE researcher
- an interview and informal discussion with the teacher leading the project, the school's deputy head teacher and informal conversations with artist practitioners and other members of staff
- a pupil focus group in which the researcher spoke to selected pupils and the pupils completed an attitudes and experiences response activity
- short, medium and long-term planning documents for the Patagonia topic that was heavily linked with the project
- surveys and teacher enquiry tools from the overall pilot project evaluation, including teacher learning logs and 'blob tree' pupil social-emotional response exercise
- the lead teacher, for whom an assignment forming part of her master's degree focused on the links between music, language learning and the Listening to Language project

## Professional learning environment

### Teachers as professional learners in learning through the arts

The Listening to Language project has aligned with the school's approach to professional development, which aims to enrich the school's creative and thematic approach to the curriculum by building teacher skills and teaching strategies across the curriculum. Through the project, teachers reported participating in a variety of CPD activities, including workshops, watching artist practitioners model new approaches and techniques, integrating the materials into their classroom teaching, and reflecting on how their practice was changing and its impact on pupils. In every case, the aim was to incorporate trilingual language learning with the expressive arts, including music, drama and dance. For the participating teachers, this represented a valuable opportunity to develop their practice, supported by external expertise from musicians at BBC NOW and language specialists. Teachers report having used the Listening to Language approach and activities in their day-to-day classroom practice, including in the teaching of non-arts-based subjects. As one teacher commented in the evaluation enquiry tools: "Participating in the Listening to Language project has given me greater confidence about introducing modern foreign languages into my professional practice in future."

### Focusing teacher learning on pupil achievement

As part of their professional learning, teachers reflected on what pupils need to effectively learn new languages and the barriers they face in achieving this. Teachers described their thinking in evaluation enquiry tools, including how they used the Listening to Language approach to support pupils who struggle with writing, or to offer an engaging stimulus as a ‘way in’ to the curriculum:

“I have learned to try innovative approaches and be more flexible in my approach to teaching, enabling pupils to feel empowered to master language in a new way. I understand that the expressive arts can be a powerful tool for learning and can provide an engaging stimulus or ‘way in’ to [different] aspects of the curriculum. I also think that the ‘freedom’ of the expressive arts activities will be greatly beneficial to the less able pupils.”

“[I am using] the approach to overcome difficulties with written literacy, e.g. knowing where to place the stress of a word, to develop improved pronunciation and spelling.”

Teachers report that participating pupils have greater interest and engagement, both in learning modern foreign languages and in the wider curriculum. They focus in particular on the impact for previously less able or less confident pupils: “One pupil in particular who usually finds it difficult to speak in front of the class totally surprised me when asked to sing the *Ton Gron* in groups...He shone, and sang his solo with clear volume. This was a significant step forward for his development.”

### Use of specialist arts expertise

A key factor in the success of teachers’ learning as part of the project has been the schools’ and teachers’ own ability to harness the specialist expertise of the linguists supporting the project and the musicians from BBC NOW. In the second year, this included an increase in the extent to which the artist practitioners co-delivered music and language learning lessons with teachers, as well as working with teachers outside the classroom to plan lessons.

Teachers reflected positively on how the expertise of the artist practitioners had complemented their own expertise. For example, the lead teacher is confident in languages, so sought support from the artist practitioners around music. In contrast, the Year 6 teacher is more musically confident but less confident with languages, so sought more support in this area. Recognising how their own areas of expertise and confidence fitted with specialist expertise within the project enabled the school to adapt how they were working with the external specialists. Looking ahead, the school is keen to continue making the most of the expertise captured in the resources, such as the videos, to sustain musical development. But it also recognises that this is no substitute for working with professional musicians, and that continuing some specialist musical support is challenging.



Musicians and language specialists work with teachers to develop approaches to teaching and learning modern foreign languages. Photo: Jon Pountney.

### Use of evidence and enquiry

The ambition and innovation embedded within the Listening to Language project meant that it lent itself to the use of evidence and enquiry to support professional learning. In addition to teacher reflection, enquiry tools and surveys carried out as part of the wider TDF evaluation during the course of the project, the lead teacher was undertaking a master's degree focused on middle leadership. As part of this, she completed an assignment exploring how "the musical rhythmic composition of language can improve trilingual learning, through the exploration of pupils' motivation and levels of wellbeing."

In addition to reviewing the literature relating to the links between music, language and learning, which supplemented her learning through the project, the lead teacher used the 'blob tree' tool (an aspect of the project evaluation) as a source of evidence and as a "psycho-emotional pre-assessment". As described in her assignment: "The blobs are a variety of characters in pictorial form without words...that allow young children to deal with deep issues using feelings and body language."

The space and focus afforded by the master's assignment enhanced the lead teacher's support for the project and helped her develop specialist expertise for sustaining and developing the approach, particularly in relation to language learning, in future. This aligns with the point previously made, relating to the importance of maintaining the presence of a subject specialist in order to further sustain and develop the approach.

### Teaching and learning through the arts

#### Teaching and learning approaches and strategies to learning through the arts

Alongside the artist practitioners, teachers have developed an approach to learning through the arts, characterised by activities that combine music, rhythm, movement and language. These were frequently explored in relation to a project focused on learning about Patagonia (where there is the largest contingent of Welsh speakers outside of Wales). The rich activities characterising the school's thematic approach to the curriculum included:

- children planning a musical composition to track and convey the journey to Patagonia – through identifying the sounds and instruments, paying attention to pitch, dynamics, tempo and texture, to communicate the mood and atmosphere of key moments in the journey
- developing pupils' ICT, film and media skills by using a green screen app and iMovie to create a musical postcard – choosing a background and recording a message using phrases from three languages

## Case study: Burry Port Community Primary School

- a wide range of creative writing activities, often peer assessed, such as:
  - writing a diary entry for sailors on the journey to Patagonia
  - report writing about an animal in Patagonia
  - drama and script writing to act out key moments from the journey, including dialogue in three languages
  - writing travel brochures for Patagonia to develop persuasive writing
  - writing poetry/jingles to advertise Patagonia to visitors
- learning the trilingual Tengo Tango and performing it to an audience

Teachers feel that exploring these activities had a positive impact on their pedagogy, with one commenting: “I am much more confident to deliver music workshops and deliver language in a more creative and engaging way...I have adapted the way I teach to incorporate more innovation, risk-taking and creativity.”

In her master's assignment, the lead teacher reflects on how this new approach to teaching and learning through the arts differs from traditional teaching principles – where, rather than teachers being seen as having the knowledge and directly imparting it to pupils, and correcting them when they make mistakes, the teacher's role becomes that of a “learning coach”, encouraging pupils to take risks and setting up challenges and mistakes as something “vital to real learning”. The teachers are already starting to see the impact of this on pupils, with the post-intervention ‘blob trees’ indicating that 100% of pupils were now responding positively to learning through the expressive arts (compared to 68% pre-intervention) and reporting an increased confidence and preference for drama, music and performance.

### Strategies for overcoming barriers to learning

For teachers at the school, one aspect of developing their practice in teaching through the expressive arts has been exploring how this approach can be used to identify and overcome barriers to learning, in particular for vulnerable pupils. The lead teacher highlights how the pre-intervention ‘blob trees’ and classroom observations as part of the enquiry process were key to identifying pupil barriers to learning at the beginning of the project, including in relation to:

- a lack of motivation and interest towards literacy tasks from a large number of pupils, in particular where these involved the Welsh language
- issues around self-esteem, engagement and confidence for 63% of the cohort, as identified by a wellbeing tracker used by the school
- socio-economic barriers and a related lack of opportunities. The lead teacher reflected that of the pupils who demonstrated negative attitudes in the pre-intervention ‘blob trees’, all had limited musical backgrounds and language levels below age-related expectations, whilst a number had disrupted home lives.

## Case study: Burry Port Community Primary School

Teachers already had a strong understanding of these barriers and were keen to use the Listening to Language approach to overcome them. The ways in which they sought to achieve this included:

- oral activities to develop literacy skills and confidence in performing in front of their peers and other audiences
- drama workshops to develop creativity and expression in a “non-judgemental way, free from the constraints of written tasks”, and to support learning in other topics, such as Welsh history
- using music and language learning to “level the playing field”

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*“There are no barriers to learning languages – the music has made it easy. I can clearly hear the number of syllables in the sound, the rhythm tells me how to say it and in what language, then I just know the word.”*

Burry Port pupil

Teachers were starting to notice the impact of this approach on their learners, noting that they had seen the social dynamic of the classroom shift towards a more supportive ethos. As one teacher commented: “The fact that all pupils were starting from the same baseline when learning Spanish has limited the power struggles in relationships and enabled the less able and less confident pupils to flourish alongside their peers.” Teachers also felt that the experience of learning in this way had been very positive for pupils with additional learning needs.

### **Quality arts experiences for learners experiencing disadvantage**

The access to quality arts experiences for particular subgroups of learners, including those experiencing disadvantage, was explored in the lead teacher’s master’s assignment when reflecting on her experiences as part of the project. She noted that while it is a national priority in Wales to combat the impact of poverty and social disadvantage, there was a need to question whether the system was “sending [an] underlying message that creative subjects are not as important or relevant”, and in doing so, “creating a divergence between children whose parents can afford to take them to private music tuition, theatre groups and dance classes, and those whose access comes mainly or solely through the school curriculum”.

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*“I feel so proud that I can now understand languages. I listen to the music and I see the picture in my head, then I think hard about what the word is.”*

Burry Port pupil



Listening to Language looks at how musical elements of language, such as rhythm, repetition and rhyme, can aid learning. Photo: Jon Pountney.

### Leading and embedding learning through the arts

#### School vision and values

The school believes that embedding learning through the expressive arts in the curriculum is important and wants the project to have a lasting impact. The deputy head teacher reflected that “music is such a great vehicle for language learning – it is so inclusive. All children are engaged.” The school feels that the rhythm, music and language approach is especially important in developing early literacy. Its vision for moving forwards is for the lead teacher in the project to lead on developing a more common approach to language learning across the school, including making links to early years.

Teachers also spoke about the importance of the emotional side of learning. They felt that, both in terms of enjoyment and breaking down barriers to learning, the Listening to Language approach fit within the emotional aspirations for children’s learning. The ‘blob tree’ enquiry tools had made these social-emotional aspects of learning more visible during the project.

#### Teacher leadership and ownership of learning through the arts

The leadership of the lead teacher on the project has been a key factor in how it has taken off in the school, with the deputy head teacher describing her “can-do attitude”, “positive mindset” and “risk taking” as an important driver of the project. The lead teacher has also recently been granted a teaching and learning responsibility in leading and managing the curriculum across Years 4–6. The project has helped her and others to develop a shared vision for what this will look like.

#### Embedding learning through the arts in the curriculum

The approach taken within the Listening to Language project fits within and enhances the thematic and arts-rich curriculum in the school. Teachers report that they devote regular teaching time to lessons that can be described as learning through the arts. The Burry Port teachers our CUREE researcher spoke to were also keen to stress the role that the children had in the curriculum. The school has numerous channels for pupil voices, including starting topics by discussing “What can we do? What would you like to do?” with the children.

Most of the curriculum at Burry Port is delivered through termly themes. For the Listening to Language project, the focus theme centred on Patagonia. Within the Patagonia theme there are several areas, including:

- **‘Culture: Here and There’** where children compare cultures and lives in Wales to Patagonia and elsewhere, and participate in a variety of musical, literacy, and creative activities, events and competitions for the school and Urdd Eisteddfod
- **‘Hola Patagonia!’** where, through historical enquiry, analysing primary sources of evidence, hot seating and diary writing, children imagine what life was like for Welsh immigrants in South America

Other concurrent topic areas include, ‘Why do Penguins Huddle?’, ‘Being a Global Citizen’ and a ‘Geography/Numeracy’ area. It is the links with the Patagonia topic, and in particular the ‘Hola Patagonia!’ area, which represent the most firmly embedded aspects of the Listening to Language project in Burry Port’s curriculum. All the resources, practices and activities developed by the teachers will be used in future years. Teachers reported that it was easier to embed learning from the project in the second year. They knew what was coming in advance and were able to plan the approach to the Patagonia theme. By contrast, in the first year the project had to run alongside their pre-planned curriculum, which made everything much harder.

### Systems for monitoring and evaluating impact of learning through the arts

In addition to reflection and evidence collection through the project’s enquiry tools, the development of children’s language skills is a particular focus area. The deputy head reported that the school was very happy with its success with languages, Spanish in particular, and was seeing the impact of this. The school had recently heard that some of the children involved in the project during its first year, and were now in Year 7 in a local secondary school, had won an award for their Spanish. The deputy head held that pupil success and engagement with Welsh and modern foreign languages was a clear and important indicator of success, which the school would continue to monitor.

### Making connections

Another aspect of the project and the school’s approach to the curriculum is its outward-looking nature and the connections it looks to make with children’s home lives, other cultures and the world at large. Teachers reported that the Listening to Language project had made the school a more international environment, helping children to understand other cultures, countries and languages. The teachers and pupils spoke about the Patagonia assembly put on for the children’s parents and carers as a particularly memorable success, which helped the children to share and celebrate their learning and to make connections between what they were learning at school and their families. Another connection made with the children’s parents and carers was the school’s strategy of sharing termly thematic topic overviews in advance of the topics, encouraging parents and carers to support their children and enrich their learning at home.

### Where next?

The school believes that much of what they have learned and done on the Listening to Language project will have a lasting impact on the school. The school is enthusiastic about the new Welsh curriculum and believes that it has already developed a future-proof thematic curriculum model, which speaks to the aims and content of the new curriculum. The activities incorporated into the thematic Patagonia topic are illustrative of their approach to the curriculum, which they feel confident includes arts throughout, as well as a rich blend of language, technology, maths and more. As noted, the resources, activities and strategies developed in the project and embedded in the Patagonia theme provide a lasting legacy for the school to develop in future years.

Teachers did note that it may prove harder to link to and embed the approach to learning languages in different thematic areas. However, the school is committed to building on the project and looking to expand on what it has done. It has plans in the new school year to spread the approach to learning Spanish across Key Stage 2, led by the lead teacher for Listening to Language. The deputy head is confident that the skills and ideas from the project have made their way into colleagues' thinking and teaching repertoire. The challenge is finding the resources to harness and spread these across the school.

The future direction of learning from the project and where it can be developed and applied rests with the lead teacher. Recommendations from her master's assignment give insight into her thinking for the project's future. Her recommendations include:

- share learning with all colleagues to raise awareness of the project and to ensure understanding of the aims and objectives and its potential to impact on learner outcomes and wellbeing
- continue into the third phase of training to gain further expert knowledge and skill from the musicians and linguists to further develop personal CPD in the expressive arts to take the project to the next level
- provide coaching and mentoring to another colleague to begin to implement the new pedagogical skills with a different cohort
- undertake a second cycle of practitioner research, which would provide an opportunity to replicate the study, making the necessary changes in order to further improve the validity of results and minimise bias. Be certain to focus on one variable, ensure the administration of the pre- and post-vocabulary testing to support triangulation.

For a Welsh translation of this case study or the Teacher Development Fund pilot programme 2016–18 evaluation, contact [ela@phf.org.uk](mailto:ela@phf.org.uk).



Musicians from BBC NOW participate in Listening to Language.  
Photo: Jon Pountney.

## Further reading

### **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](http://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](http://phf.org.uk/TDF/Hotspur).

### **Case study: St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School, Full Steam Ahead (Ballycastle, Northern Ireland)**

This study explores how teachers acquired a sophisticated understanding of the technical aspects of film (as consumers and creators) and translated this understanding to pupils. It also looks at how this approach 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. The full case study is at [phf.org.uk/TDF/StPatricksStBrigids](http://phf.org.uk/TDF/StPatricksStBrigids).

### **Teacher Development Fund: Year one pilot evaluation**

Read the report:  
[phf.org.uk/TDF/YearOnePilotEvaluation](http://phf.org.uk/TDF/YearOnePilotEvaluation).

### **Teacher Development Fund pilot programme 2016–18 evaluation**

Read the report:  
[phf.org.uk/TDF/PilotProgrammeEvaluation](http://phf.org.uk/TDF/PilotProgrammeEvaluation).

Learn more about the Fund at [phf.org.uk/funds/tdf](http://phf.org.uk/funds/tdf).

For details on application deadlines, contact  
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