

darts



# Creative classrooms

**Case Study**  
Artist Development

# Fran's Creative Classrooms Journey

## What is Creative Classrooms?

Creative Classrooms is a drama programme designed for primary schools, Years 1 to 4, to support students to develop their emotional literacy, while building communication and empathy skills. The work is rooted in darts' approach which draws on over 30 years' experience of delivering creative activity in partnership with schools.

Professional theatre-makers work with a whole class for a half term, using an age-appropriate story to increasingly understand a range of emotions the characters are feeling, and in turn, we might feel too. As part of Creative Classrooms, teachers and teaching assistants receive professional Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in using drama in the classroom and supporting students in understanding their emotions.

Over the weeks of participating, class teachers reported that Creative Classrooms gave students the emotional confidence and communication skills to build stronger connections with their peers, as well as the artists leading the sessions. This equips students with the tools, emotional literacy and communication skills that are essential in coping with the challenges of exams, friendships and the move towards secondary school. This is of huge benefit to their social and individual development.

This Case Study is drawn from three years of Creative Classrooms delivery funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

## Artist Development – Fran's Experience

Fran is a qualified teacher with a decade of experience working with young people in community, heritage, theatre and school settings. Fran has been delivering Creative Classrooms as a professional theatre-maker over the last 18 months.

Working with darts as a highly-skilled drama practitioner, Fran told us she found that Creative Classrooms brought about an enriching exchange of techniques, skills and experience, between darts' expertise and years of working with communities, and Fran's practice as an artist. This is incredibly beneficial for darts participants, as well as for the delivering drama practitioner: the collaborative aspect of working with darts to deliver on these workshops, alongside creating a CPD course, allowed Fran to build upon her rich portfolio of theatre-making and community arts practice.

## How has Creative Classrooms impacted student wellbeing and engagement?

For Fran, the most profound impact of Creative Classrooms has been to encourage the emotional development and artistic engagement of the students, observing how this has developed progressively over the course of the programme.

From the beginning of Creative Classrooms, Fran noted that one student had been resistant to Creative Classrooms throughout and had been hesitant to participate in the project – “...his first comment was ‘this is gay’. However, over the course of two terms, he slowly began to get involved with drama and play.”

***“I made sure to complement his performance when he finally got up in front of class, and he was able to say ‘Thank you’ - a tiny moment in some ways, but a really seismic change.”***

### **How has Creative Classrooms impacted your own practice as an artist?**

Fran told us that Creative Classrooms has been instrumental in both the emotional development of the participants, as well as her own artistic development. The work that artists carry out with darts has proven to be incredibly valuable to their own creative practice, which has important impacts across the community:

***“My practice has changed immensely. I feel a real emotional connection to the texts we use, to the work we’re making with children and young people and... the ripples are being felt across my work running youth theatres in Leeds too.”***

Bringing together darts’ research and experience, as well as collaborative input from other artists, session leaders noted the value of observing specific facilitation skills to support participant development. Through darts’ training and through running sessions, artists developed their own skills in responding to issues and participant engagement, providing the best possible experience for those in the room and beyond.

### **How has darts supported you throughout the process of planning and delivering Creative Classrooms sessions?**

In schools, Creative Classrooms encourages children to understand their own behaviours and needs in order to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, through developing key life skills such as emotional literacy and effective communication. Fran told us that throughout the programme, she felt that darts supported artists in terms of students’ emotional development and practitioners’ own artistic development. Fran explained that she experienced a unique level of support from darts:

***“I’ve never felt supported like this...”***

***“My experience of Creative Classrooms has been one of exploration, joy and wonder.”***