

darts

Creative
classrooms

Case Study
Artist Development

Katie's Experience as a Creative Classrooms Artist

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 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 – Katie's Experience

Katie Matthews is a theatre practitioner with over 20 years' experience in delivering drama-based workshops in schools, theatres and community settings. She has her own theatre company and has designed and toured shows for children nationally.

Katie told us that, throughout each stage of the Creative Classrooms programme, she felt that darts provided her with unparalleled support as a delivering artist. This meant that Katie was able to respond to the needs of the students who took part. The close involvement of this collaborative way of working was beneficial to both the students' emotional wellbeing and communication skills, as well as the Katie's own creative practice.

"The group coming together to develop and share practice is a game-changer, it so rarely happens. Similarly, co-facilitation and working together in schools has made a massive difference to the project and my practice."

Commented [SS1]: I wonder if it needs a short para for each of these that says e.g. 'Katie Matthews is a theatre practitioner with XX years of experience in delivering drama based workshops in schools, theatres and community settings. She has her own theatre company and has designed and toured shows for children nationally.'

How significant was the impact on those who were participating in the programme?

By working closely with teachers through co-planning and delivery, and delivering these sessions within schools, Katie was able to build a strong connection with both teaching staff and the students who take part in the sessions. Katie noted how she saw huge improvements in the engagement and emotional development of the students throughout the course of the Creative Classrooms programme. With school teaching staff equipped with the CPD training provided by darts artists, these benefits experienced by students will be embedded long term. For Katie, an important part of the process in working with darts on Creative Classrooms was observing, facilitating, and contributing to the development of the pupils during the full course of the programme:

"It's the little moments and the big changes – knowing you're going with them on a journey."

As an artist coming into the school and Creative Classrooms space, Katie noted how the programme works with schools to provide a rounded and varied education by providing students with essential tools that fall outside the scope of the standard curriculum. As a person-led arts charity, darts places emphasis on understanding the needs of its communities and adapting its programmes accordingly. Being part of darts' work in the community, Katie explained that much of her practice involved developing the programme, watching it evolve and change to suit the pupils on an individual and collective level.

How did the project impact on Katie's own creative practice as an artist?

Through a working partnership with school teaching staff and darts, Katie's drama practice developed significantly. The collaborative process of co-delivery and co-planning meant that Katie was able to benefit from new ideas, particularly through the research carried out by darts, as well as ideas and techniques shared by other artists.

"My practice has changed loads, I always do check-ins now and consider mental health a crucial part of my process."

As a skilled art practitioner, with years of experience, Katie found that working with darts on Creative Classrooms expanded her skillset and artist development even further – not only in terms of working with young people in a classroom setting, through working alongside teaching staff to understand the breadth of needs that children and young people might encounter across the primary education system.

How well did darts support Katie as an artist?

Katie told us that artist support is key to every one of darts' programmes. darts provides close communication, co-planning and shadowing, alongside training videos and scientific research to equip artists with the knowledge and support needed to deliver brilliant and impactful sessions within Creative Classrooms. For Katie, darts provided unparalleled support in her work as a drama practitioner and in delivering workshops for Creative Classrooms.

"I've never experienced support like this."

Commented [SS2]: If it's Katie Matthews, she definitely isn't an emerging artist – she's really skilled and experienced!

Commented [EE3R2]: Have changed this para – please see adjustments!