

darts



Case Study
Levett School

Creative Classrooms with the Levett School

Reflections with Sara Rook, Teacher

What is Creative Classrooms?

Creative Classrooms is darts' programme of creative activity with schools, designed to improve students' key skills like emotional literacy, teamwork, and communication. Here, pupils explore stories from different characters' perspectives, build their own narratives and create something new they can share as a performance with their peers and educators.

Teachers have also been supported to take this model forward in their classrooms through a robust CPD model delivered by artists. When working in partnership with mainstream primary schools from 2020 - 2023, we found that Creative Classrooms improves confidence in the classroom, collaboration amongst classmates and participating children's emotional literacy.

Creative Classrooms in the Levett School has been generously funded by the Charles Hayward Foundation for school years 2024 - 2026. This has enabled us to deliver weekly drama sessions for students from Year 1 to Year 6. The Levett School is currently the only Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in Doncaster. This school's curriculum and approach is designed to support pupils who have found mainstream school extremely challenging.

Pupils may have been expelled or excluded repeatedly, and some attend the Levett School on a short-term basis for preventative placements, while others are long-term pupils. Classes are smaller than those in mainstream settings and pupils often have complex needs. Emma Liversidge-Smith, Core Artist at darts, has led this work in partnership with Moony Wainwright, Freelance Artist.

Sara's Reflections

Sara has been a classroom teacher at the Levett School for many years and previously taught in mainstream schools. She is also the Lead for Curriculum, working closely with the Senior Lead for Curriculum in school to design a curriculum for their pupil cohort, aged 5 - 14. Sara explained that her job is:

"Both teaching and pastoral, crossed with almost being a social worker. Teachers at Levett wear lots of different hats and the goalposts for success are much broader in a PRU. Our pupils come from all over Doncaster, are here on a mix of short- and long-term placements and we operate a rolling cohort, so new pupils often arrive throughout the school year."

"You're always on your toes, responding to a child's needs in that exact moment while knowing that what works for them in one minute, can be a problem and cause dysregulation for them half an hour later."

Sara has been working with darts building Creative Classrooms for the last 18 months and described the work as:

“Awe-inspiring. When the project was first introduced to me a couple of years ago, my heart sank. I thought ‘How am I going to get them to participate? What boundaries, expectations and consequences will I have to put in place?’ I couldn’t believe it would work for our kids.”

Within two weeks of lead artist, Emma, coming in, Sara said she realised Creative Classrooms could be brilliant for her pupils:

“Emma was managing the room, and the children were listening to her and bringing their own ideas too. The environment Emma creates is one where everyone feels safe. She has built on what we already do in our classrooms, on the trust our staff have built with our pupils and created a space where children can be creative and explore in new ways.”

You’re often hyper vigilant in this work, having visitors like Emma and Moony who can work really well with your children allows you to play a different role. You can praise the children more; you can participate with them. I can build relationships with my pupils without having to be in control of the classroom – because I trust Emma and Moony to hold this.”

The artists use drama and music techniques to bring our stories to life, and we all take part. I can feel vulnerable when we’re giving this stuff a go, but the kids love it, they get to see me and the rest of the team trying something outside of our comfort zone. The attitude Moony and Emma bring is, ‘If it goes wrong, we can fix it.’”

Sara reflected on her pupils’ experiences too:

“I’ve been surprised by how my students will be vulnerable and creative in front of their peers. A child who is normally quiet is the key singer on the piece we are now making. Last year, we had a child who was struggling to engage until Emma introduced a character he identified with, provided a costume he could wear and be filmed in. It was like a light switch had turned on, he was so excited to take part and bring our story to life – these moments are gamechangers for our students.”

Visiting facilitators can struggle in settings like Levett, Sara noted that while you can be incredibly skilled in your area of expertise, you must be able to adapt and respond to the children. When reflecting on Emma and Moony’s work, she noted:

“Their ability to transfer their skills to this environment is incredible. They have built up relationships and trust with our students and with us. They might start by sharing one idea but that’s never where we end up; it becomes a very fluid journey where the stories and themes we explore are always led by the children. At Levett, we follow a five-part teaching model: Revisit, Teach, Apply, Practice and Review and in our Creative Classroom, Emma and Moony have naturally taken on this model too.”

Sara also recognised that the work in Creative Classrooms extended past these sessions:

“Emma uses props to lead an emotional check in with the children. These started as short, single-word reflections but as we work together over the weeks and months, the children open up and explain why they’ve chosen these objects. This builds trust and helps us know what else is going on for our children. We do something very similar every morning now, touching base with our students.

As a teacher, I also take more risks because of working with darts; it’s different being able to see how other people can push your students and you can learn from them. I see my students’ growth in and out of the sessions and can celebrate their successes and sing their praises.”

Sara’s pupils will keep building Creative Classrooms through to July 2025 and will be sharing a performance at school to family, friends, and staff. Sara’s final reflection was:

“Emma and Moony are rays of sunshine at Levett; it’s hard to explain the impact they are having but we are so grateful for your work with us.”

You can find out more about Creative Classrooms [here](#) or by getting in touch with Emma@wearedarts.org.uk

