

Cultural Partner Case Study 2018-19

Cultural Organisation and SLiCE® Lead	Rebecca Finley/Carys Williams, Royal Exchange Theatre
SLiCE® Fellow and Partner School	Dave Moloney, Fred Longworth High School
Action Research Question	<i>“How far and in what ways can you evidence the impact on your organisation of working with a SLiCE® fellow and their teaching school alliance?”</i>
Other Partners	
Dates of Project	January 2019 – July 2019

Background of cultural organisation

Brief overview of what your organisation does

The Royal Exchange Theatre is a producing house theatre in the centre of Manchester. Alongside a busy programme of plays and musicals, the Royal Exchange delivers a large portfolio of Creative Learning and Engagement activities, working with children from aged 5 – older people both in communities and in the building.

Project Summary (Context and Objectives)

Summary of SLiCE placements and context of the project

This was our second year working with Dave and Fred Longworth High School. After a meeting with Jude Bird at Curious Minds, it was decided that, unlike the first year of the project, Dave would work with us on a project focusing on teachers and their mental health and wellbeing and looking at the differences and similarities of staff welfare in schools and arts organisations. Dave spent a day at the Royal Exchange meeting with our HR department to understand our way of working and then developed his ‘Notebox’ project. This saw three creative writing workshops happen at the Royal Exchange (led by Anne-Marie Smith from Bangor University) with staff members from both the theatre and three different schools taking part. A structure was then developed that toured to schools encouraging staff and students to write and either post their writing in a ‘notebox’ or display on the structure for everyone to see.

Impacts and Outcomes (Understanding key learning)

List up to 6 bullet points that capture the key learning from the programme.

Try and formulate a response to the action research question. What is different now? Describe any changes, new thinking or new relationships that have emerged. How has SLiCE impacted on yourself and people within the organisation.

- Staff were given the opportunity to take part in a project that focused on their mental health and wellbeing. This is rare both in schools and arts organisations as so often we focus on the work or the students rather than ourselves. They were given the gift of being able to take time out from their work to focus on something different.
- Staff had the opportunity to mix with other members of staff both at their place of work who they might not normally speak to and from other organisations.
- Being given the opportunity to think about the similarities between arts organisations and schools. Most people go into jobs in both places due to a passion rather than a drive for money. Both organisations require lots of additional hours and work.
- From an organisational perspective, we learnt that projects like this are good to do with SLiCE as there is no pressure of a big final outcome where we feel compelled to do lots of work. This project put more of the organisational skills on the teacher rather than us which was effective.
- Despite the efforts from our partner teacher to engage 9 teachers in the workshops, unfortunately there was poor attendance across the sessions. The first one being the most successful with 5 teachers attending, followed by 2 at the second workshop and 3 at the third and final. Down to both pressures within school and a lack of ability for the school to support teachers having away time from class, this brought round some interesting reflections to draw.

Obstacles and issues

List up to 3 bullet points that describe any difficulties or challenges encountered through the delivery of the project.

- The communication with our partner was difficult due to his busy schedule in school and not being able to give up the time required for the project
- The notebook was due to come to the Royal Exchange theatre and be on display, however due to a lack of planning on our partner's front, this did not end up happening
- The continued support for staff attending the workshops was discussed at length at the start of the process, given the sensitive nature of the project, however no clear plan was set forward by our partner which leaves question marks around the long term impact the project may or may not have had on its participants.

Next steps and futures

List up to 3 bullet points that detail future plans, partnership ideas

- We hope to visit the notebbox in a school if we can't have it at the Royal Exchange.
- We will continue to have a relationship with Fred Longworth High School especially as Leigh is an area that we are particularly focusing on this year (2019-20).

Wellbeing

How has your knowledge, understanding or thinking around inclusion changed as a result of SLICE[®]?

It was great to focus on this with different staff members across our building and develop a project that concentrates on wellbeing. As an arts organisation, I think we are sensitive to wellbeing, however the work always comes first, so it was great to be able to allow staff members to focus on this for a number of sessions.