



CO-OP ACADEMY: CONFIDENCE IS THE KEY

It's tempting to take the word 'confidence' for granted. We consider it in relation to ourselves and any feelings of self-assurance that we have. But look it up in the dictionary and you'll find another, quite interesting perspective, and one that sits beautifully alongside any the personal confidence that students at Co-op Academy, Leeds have benefitted from because of Burberry Inspire.

“

THE FEELING OR
BELIEF THAT ONE
CAN HAVE FAITH
IN OR RELY ON
SOMEONE OR
SOMETHING.

CO-OP ACADEMY LEEDS PARTNER ALLOCATION:

2019 / YEAR ONE:
LEEDS YOUNG FILM

2020 / YEAR TWO:
LEEDS PLAYHOUSE

2021 / YEAR THREE:
NORTHERN BALLET

2022 / YEAR FOUR:
THE HEPWORTH WAKEFIELD



Speaking to educators at Co-op Academy, the programme has been a connective tissue between their disciplines, but moreover has added a welcome layer of authority for the students – one that fosters self-belief through the knowledge that they are seeing something first hand. “They don’t see teachers necessarily as like ‘professional artists’, so they don’t want to impress us,” laughs Naomi Wall, the subject leader for art. She and her team saw a noticeable uptick in creative confidence during their time working with The Hepworth Wakefield. “If I’m honest, a lot of our students aren’t very proud of their work,” she explains. “They get very shy about showing it and want it to go in the bin. We have real battles with the bins and the work is not allowed to go in them.” However, she and fellow art teacher Katie Booth quickly noticed a change in their students as artists in residence from THW joined them. Instead of the constant reassurance they were used to giving during Key Stage 3 art lessons, four weeks into working with THW, the youngsters were working independently. They were confidently leading their own creativity.



However, as fast as it might first appear, this kind of confidence really does emerge over time. As Burberry Inspire penetrates the cultural fabric of a school, it becomes clear to the students that this is not a flash in the pan, but a long-term part of how they will be learning. By the time Katie’s students had found their inner assurance, Co-op Academy were in their final year of the programme. What came before acted as layer upon layer of experiences to reach this point. A great example of the earlier impact comes from drama teacher, Ciaran Keddy, whose Year 9 students worked on a complex performance with practitioners from Leeds Playhouse. Two classes of drama students were taught their parts of the performance separately, but the outcome would be ‘meshed’ together. “It wasn’t even ‘this class are doing scene one and the other group is doing scene two,’” he explains.

“Both classes were in both scenes.” On top of this, there were multi-disciplinary elements of music, dance, set design and tech, giving a huge number of students the opportunity to shine in different areas of the performance. By Ciaran’s own admission, some of his drama students were “challenging. There were sessions where I was having to stand next to them, jumping up and down like a starfish!” But not only did they achieve a brilliant end result, with the two groups seamlessly fitting together, the students confidently performed to 220 of their peers – the hardest audience of all. “You could just see the change in the kids and how excited they were with how it had turned out.”

This is powerful enough in the classroom, but what happens when the students are not in the comfort zone that the familiarity of school provides? Taking young people out of lessons to experience their local cultural life is fun, yes, but it also opens a door that might otherwise stay shut. The ability to visit a museum, gallery or theatre should be a given, but it isn’t. “We put on shows here and charge a pound, and still a child will say ‘my mum can’t come, we can’t afford it’. It breaks your heart.” Associate Assistant Principle and music teacher, Sharleen Shaw views trips to the theatre, such as a Year 7’s visit to see *The Wizard of Oz*, as an entertaining and enjoyable day out, yes, but also as an important means of social mobility. Ticket prices are restrictive for many of the student’s families, which subsequently removes the option for cultural experiences from the minds of young people. Visits simply end up falling into the category of not being ‘for us’. Trips such as this will stay with the students long into adulthood, be remembered fondly and may well be the difference between feeling able to confidently walk through the door again or not.

“

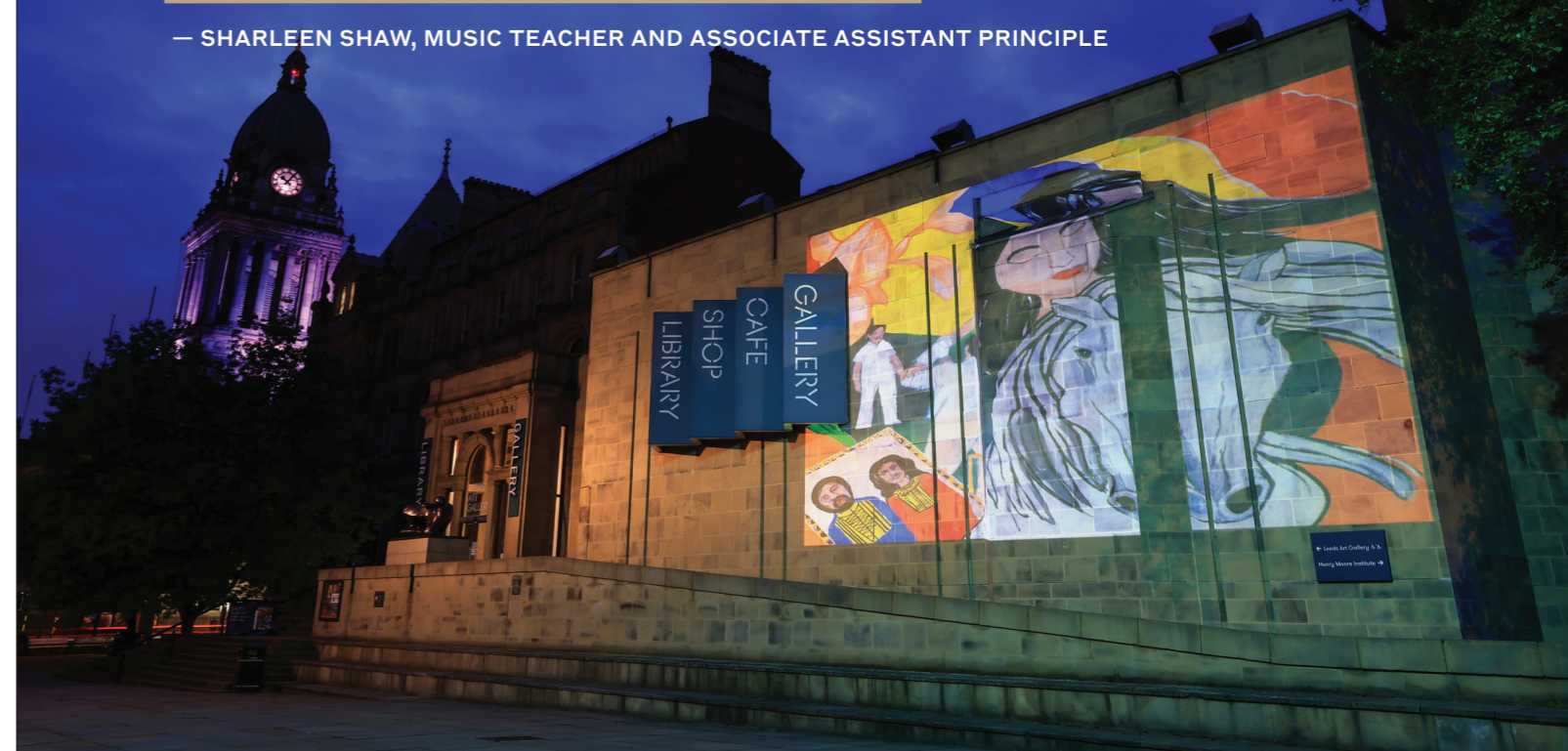
I THINK YOU GET USED TO HAVING ALL THESE RULES OF HOW TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING. AND IT ACTUALLY TAKES AWAY A LOT OF THE CREATIVITY – AND ALL THE CHILDREN CAN END UP HAVING SUCH A SIMILAR RESULT. IT WAS NICE FOR ME TO RE-WATCH THAT ‘FREE’ APPROACH AND REALISE THAT I DON’T NEED TO OVER PLAN SO MUCH. BECAUSE THERE IS A LOT OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE HAPPY ACCIDENTS.

— NAOMI WALL, SUBJECT LEAD FOR ART

“

THE EXPERIENCES OF GOING TO THE ART GALLERY OR GOING TO THE THEATRE – THEY MIGHT FORGET MY LESSONS, BUT THEY’LL REMEMBER THOSE EXPERIENCES.

— SHARLEEN SHAW, MUSIC TEACHER AND ASSOCIATE ASSISTANT PRINCIPLE



The fresh potential for social mobility also shows itself in student’s choices as they rise through the years at Co-op Academy. In planning for the future, Sharleen notes that the arts have permeated into decision-making processes for their young people and curriculum alike. “The numbers have increased. We offer dance at Key Stage 4 now, two groups in drama – a vocational course and GCSE, whereas before it was just one small group,” she explains. “In ICT, they’re doing Creative Media, which comes from Leeds Young Film, and also media studies, which is a new subject. I would say that our numbers have grown for the students opting to do the arts in our subject, which is great.” Out of thirty music students, nine have gone on to Leeds City College (formerly Leeds College of Music) to study music. Talent scouts through the relationship with Northern Ballet identified four dancers – male and female – and offered them bursaries to study with them at weekends. Others have gone on to study film. As Sharleen rightly says, this is great. Not just because of the excellent new career pathways that the arts open up, but because of the transferrable skills that arts students can apply across the rest of their subjects – and in adult life. “It’s (Burberry Inspire) been a vehicle to promote the arts for further education. The outside agencies did a Q&A, which was really helpful for the students to see that ‘this is my real-life job’, just because you do music doesn’t mean you only have to be a music teacher. You can go into so many different jobs. And that was really

really powerful for our students, to open their eyes and ears.”

Of course, the last few years have been a rollercoaster for the teaching staff at Co-op Academy, with the pandemic meaning that they juggled their roles as educators with a high level of welfare-related actions and practical necessities, knocking on doors and telephoning parents every day. They delivered Chromebooks, art packs and musical instruments to student’s home, so they could continue their studies. But they also delivered lunch vouchers and organised food collections from



BURBERRY INSPIRE

the school. However, amongst all this they speak of their personal experiences of Burberry Inspire with enormous fondness and, it could be ventured, a little surprise. Bringing new teachers into their classrooms allowed them to step back and think about their own practice. "By watching someone else and seeing their new energy and their new perspective, and how the kids behave with new people, kind of just re-boosts me," says Ciaran. Sharleen agrees. "As practitioners that don't get that reflection time and to develop our own practice, watching somebody you can get so many tips. Watching the person delivering the workshop, you see it from the child's point of view. So, that's been really helpful." It seems it's not just the students who have received a confidence lift from Burberry Inspire.

It all stems from a sense of value. When we believe that we are cared for and important in the eyes of others, it can make us feel like we are capable of anything.

The duration and extent of the programme certainly gave all involved the essential sense that they are being invested in, which in turn increases confidence. But the careful and kind surprises that seem to be the hallmark of working with the creative partners tip Burberry Inspire into the realms of life-changing experiences. Naomi



explains, "something that I was incredibly moved by... last year, when we worked Northern Ballet, it had a link to an artist and the children produced huge canvases. Then another artist took them out and projected those onto buildings around Leeds, captured those projections and put them on postcards." So, even though lockdown meant the youngsters couldn't get out, their art did – in a huge way. The students were in awe, the teachers were truly moved. Both were so, so proud. The postcards have been handed out everywhere, showing just what remarkable artwork the students of Co-op Academy are capable of. And there were no battles to stop them being put in the bin.

