

A real 'Wow' for 2,000 pupils!

Alastair Stewart, Education and Sports Development Manager for the Heritage Foundation - said, "I have never known an education project instantaneously grab everyone's attention and create such a 'wow' factor. It is marvellous to be part of this ground breaking project and to know the grant from the Heritage Foundation has enabled professionals working in Letchworth Garden City schools, to make such a significant difference to the education experience of their pupils."

The culmination of a very special education event - the first of its kind in the UK - will be celebrated later this month.

The first Artstart5 Conference is being held on Thursday 26 June, 2008 at Plinston Hall in Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire.

The aim of the conference is to share and explain how this exciting, innovative and unique programme has impacted upon the professional development of teachers and the creative learning skills of pupils in Letchworth Garden City Primary Schools.

People who attend will be able to experience a series of hands-on Artstart5 workshops and demonstration lessons. Teachers and educators will see, hear and experience how this programme has so successfully galvanised, inspired and changed school curriculum - and the teachers approach to the performing arts at Key Stages 1 and 2. There will be a keynote address on creativity in Schools by Pat Cochrane CEO of Cape UK.

David Wood, formerly Head of CPD at Oxford Bookes University and now a lead researcher for Creative Partnerships, has been gathering information on the impact of the programme and he will be sharing his findings on June 26.

The project involves 13 of the 14 primary schools in Letchworth Garden City (population 34,000 approx.) - a town-wide project involving three infant schools, three junior schools and seven primary schools and a special school. To date, it has involved 40 teachers in high quality Arts CPD, 90 teachers in Artstart5 starter sessions and has engaged 2,000 pupils as a result.

The programme has been devised, led and implemented by Insight Arts Foundations who are based in Bedfordshire and match-funded to the tune of £112,000 by Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and Garden City Schools.

The programme has two strands:

Strand 1 is a structured developmental programme of daily Arts activities taught for 15 minutes at the beginning of each day, to children in each class in a school. Children learn specific skills in each art form and Artstart5 develops children's capacity to use "right-brain thinking processes" to apply creative thinking approaches to learning. Many of the taught skills in the National Curriculum promote "left-brain thinking processes" and are of a logical deductive nature. Many children who have been taught the programme

regularly throughout the school year have shown improvements in attitude, concentration and capacity to learn.

In Strand 2 staff undertook an online audit of their confidence in teaching performing arts curriculum. After analysing the data, schools choose from Art, Drama, Dance and Music to develop their professional capacity. Teachers worked with expert Art teachers who delivered training and gave "in school" support. The consultants gave support to teachers in planning and teaching lessons of their own. They also had opportunities to share what they had learned with other teachers in their own schools.

What do teachers say about the impact of the project?

"I think it does help greatly with concentration and creativity. You are not giving up anything at all. It's the best way to use the first 15 minutes of the day I think, because it sets the climate for the whole day."

"There are certain children who find it very hard to settle in the morning. You know, all over the place, bouncing off the walls...and I would not be without Artstart. I really did feel that it affected them for the rest of the day and that if we did not do it they started bouncing off the walls and they would like that for the rest of the day. It is really powerful in that way."

"Children enjoy the calm"; Artstart gets me calm and ready for work" (Yr 4)"

"The children seem more focussed first thing which is important, as the way they start the day can affect the way they behave throughout the rest of the day. I find that certain children, who always want to keep turning around looking for someone to cause a distraction with, are more inclined to sit still and listen. They seem content in their own space without that constant hunger for attention." (Yr 3 teacher)

"I have really enjoyed Artstart and so have the children. It is surprisingly quick and easy to prepare for, yet the results are quite impressive" (Yr 4)

"I have really enjoyed doing Artstart and many children have told me they feel the same way too. Although I was lacking in ideas to start with, I feel my confidence has grown. I love Artstart!" (Yr 4 teacher)

"We're having a go at everything and finding the activities so much fun and varied. The children are doing short, focussed task, which really make them, think and get the creative side of their brain working. We store their work in folders and display lots of it too so the children know that their work is valued" (Yr 5 teacher)

It would be great to see you there and I hope you can make part of the conference. If you would like further information, please contact Alastair Stewart on 01462 476037 or email alastairs@letchworth.com