100 Story Building

STORY HUBS

LEARNING REPORT 1

NOVEMBER 2020

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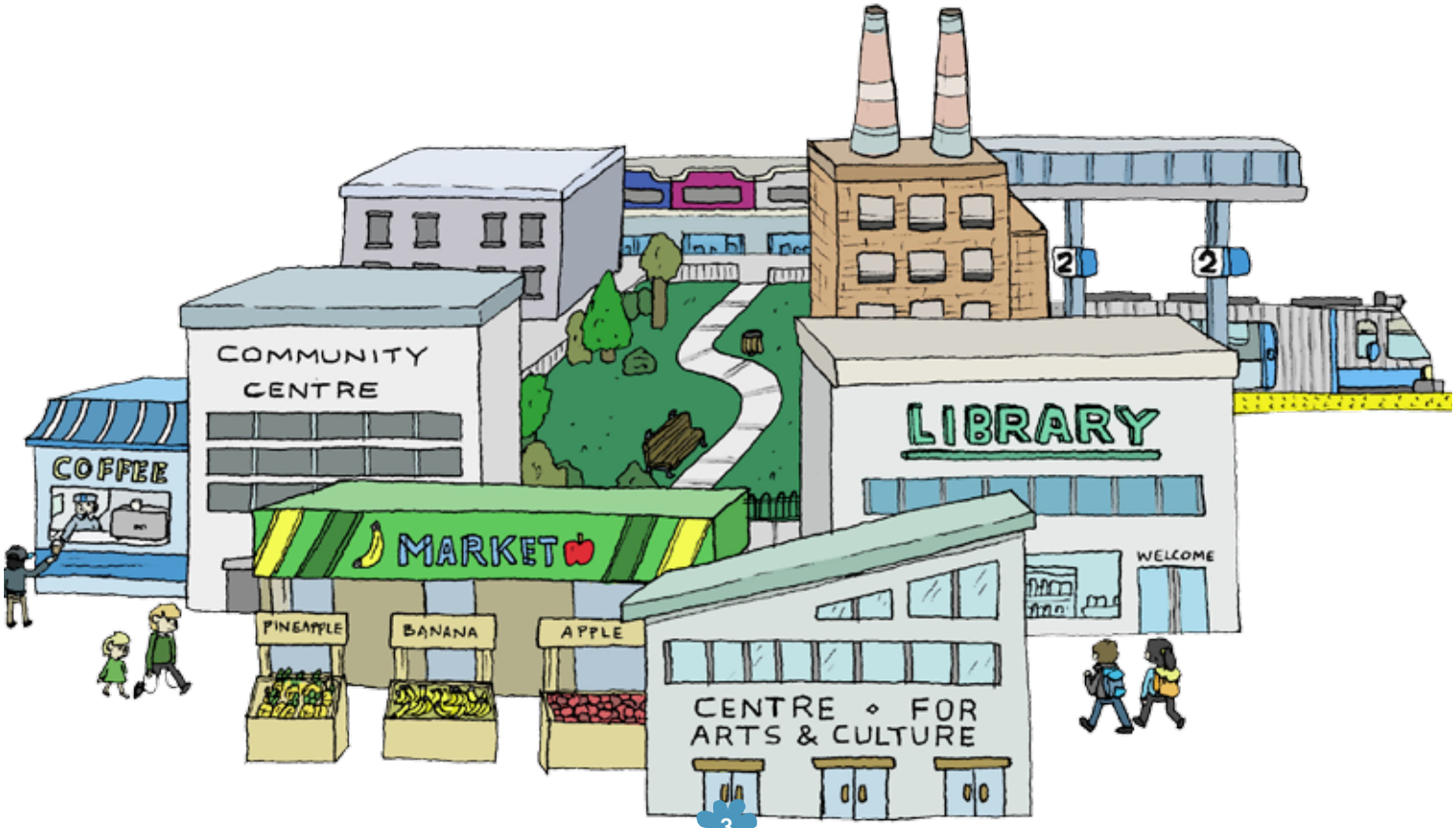
STORY HUBS

LEARNING REPORT YEAR 1

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In 2019, 100 Story Building began a three-year pilot exploring creative literacy with three schools - Copperfield College, Meadows Primary School and Sunshine Primary School. This report discusses our learnings from year 1.

- Teachers reported high student engagement in the co-design approach, which prioritised their voice and agency to make decisions.
- Teachers observed promising approaches for use in their own practice that enabled a safe classroom environment for taking risks and student ideas to flourish and be shared.
- Some evidence of teacher practice change was reported, particularly in supporting student ideas in the classroom.
- Clearer facilitation and documentation could help with the tensions created by the open, co-created nature of the project and structure imposed by classroom/school environment and curriculum.



INTRODUCTION

For many years now, educational experts across the world have called for a rethink of the way we approach creativity in the classroom. A substantial body of evidence now demonstrates the need for creativity in education[1], and the deep structural and practice changes required to support this[2]. Emerging research in innovative learning environments, 21st century teaching and learning, high impact teaching strategies and evidence-based strategies for improving student outcomes all refer to or draw on creativity and related capabilities – including collaboration, resilience and problem-solving – as essential conditions for teaching and learning in classrooms today.

But common challenges remain for teachers and schools to develop creative capabilities and embed them in their classrooms. These include a lack of clarity around what this looks like in practice[3], how this fits with 'academic' success, teacher skills and the lack of time and space in a crowded educational agenda[4]. These barriers are even higher for teachers and schools working in socio-educationally disadvantaged communities, despite evidence that shows these are the schools that have the most to gain from arts-rich teaching and learning[5].

This pilot is operating at the forefront of research into creativity and collaboration in education, modelling a way for schools to effectively practice arts-based teaching and learning and utilise innovative learning environments as pedagogical tools, particularly in areas of high community disadvantage[6].

Each of our partner schools – Copperfield College in Kings Park/Sydenham, Meadows Primary School in Broadmeadows and Sunshine Primary School in Sunshine – saw an opportunity to build teacher capacity alongside raising student achievement. In our very first meeting together, school leaders spoke of developing the 'love' - of writing, literature and learning - for teachers as well as students.

'I saw a wonderful opportunity for our students. Imagine if they were exposed to this level of 'theatre' with their work. Where could this take us?'

– Principal

This learning report draws from surveys, observations, one-on-one discussions and documentation from February-December 2019 (Story Hubs Year 1). Data collection and reporting was conducted by 100 Story Building with support from independent evaluation experts Clear Horizon, and followed a developmental evaluation plan. The focus on evaluation for Story Hubs Year 1 was codifying the model, and learnings about implementation. The purpose of this report is to ensure successes and key learnings are captured for Story Hubs partners, so as to inform years 2 and 3 of the pilot.

Initial signs of impact were observed through surveys, focus groups, and self-reporting by participants. We see this as a positive sign for the next stage of the pilot, which will include an independent impact evaluation (reporting in April 2022).

[1] Transformative: Impacts of Culture and Creativity, (2019) Produced by A New Approach (ANA) think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

[2] Imms, W, Innovative learning spaces: Catalysts/agents for change, or 'just another fad'?, School Space and Its Occupation Conceptualising and Evaluating Innovative

[3] Vincent-Lancrin, S. et al. (2019), Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking: What it Means in School, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/62212c37-en Learning Environments, 2018, 1, pp. 107 - 120

[4] Harris, A. (2017). Creative Ecologies: Fostering Creativity in Secondary Schools. Available at: http://creativeresearchhub.com

[5] Moctezuma, Jennie A., "The Lived Experience of Teachers Choosing an Arts-Rich Approach in Turnaround Schools" (2017). University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations. 2423. https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/2423

[6] Vincent-Lancrin, S. et al. 2019; ANA 2019; Imms 2018; Harris, 2017; Moctezuma 2017

Shared Understanding

In this phase we worked alongside: 28 teachers and leaders, 817 students

This phase invited teachers, students, leadership to imagine what Story Hubs could achieve for their schools.

Firstly, we modelled our arts-based approach through storytelling workshops with students from Prep to Year 7 across the three schools. Then we collaborated with 28 teachers and leaders from each school to establish three strands of change: students, teachers and community (Fig. 1).

Conceptualising a Story Hub

In this phase we worked alongside: 31 teachers and leaders, 817 students

In this phase teachers and students planned and conceptualised a Story Hub in their school: a permanent space transformed by student imaginations into a dedicated place for creativity and collaboration. This followed a divergent implementation process as each school approached the Story Hub project according to their chosen change focus and navigated it with differing participants, resources and supports. Across all schools this included:

- Half to full day professional learning sessions for teachers to seed arts-based learning approaches and principles (skills building)
- Half to full day sessions on co-designing and conceptualising a Story Hub with selected students, teachers and leadership (planning)
- Activities and lessons supporting students to engage the broader school cohort in the Story Hub concept and gather their ideas (consultation)

Design and build a Story Hub

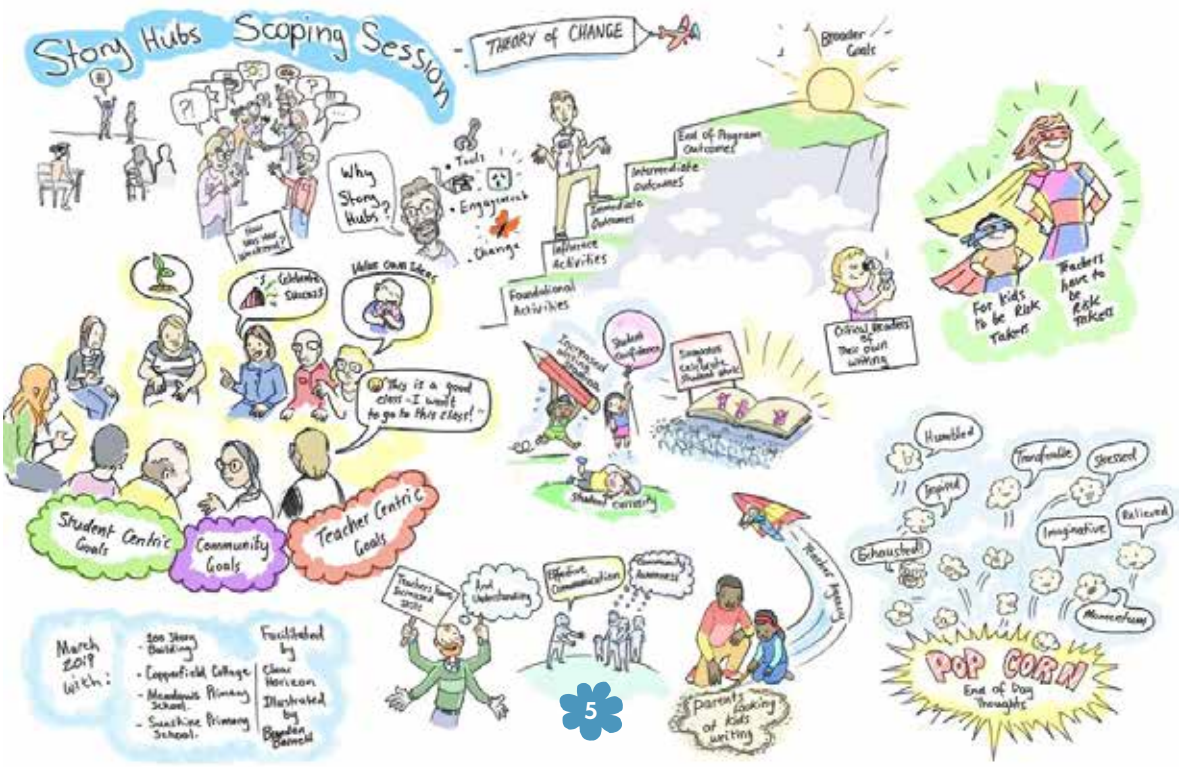
In this phase we worked alongside: 8 teachers and leaders, 78 students, 7 community members

The final phase involved students articulating the final vision and design of their Story Hub and collaborating with a designer to transform the chosen space in their school. This took the shape of:

- Small student working group sessions
- Co-design sessions with students and an artistic designer/maker
- Teacher support of sessions with some cross-curriculum lesson development
- Consultation with other stakeholders (for example, Community Hub leaders)

Three Story Hubs were launched in December 2019 and February 2020: a gateway to a dragon's den at Copperfield College, a place of light and dark magic at Sunshine Primary School and a traffic control room for inter-dimensional exploration at Meadows Primary School.

FIG. 1: STORY HUB THEORY OF CHANGE



Shared Understanding

Each school came to the Story Hubs pilot as a way to extend their own journeys of improving student outcomes. These journeys were years in the making and encompassed many aspects of the student learning experience – from improving classroom behaviours, to revising curriculum and deepening skills in reading, to developing consistency in teaching and learning cycles. They saw this pilot as an opportunity to engage students and teachers in writing through an inspirational, creative process.

Feedback from teachers on the storytelling workshops indicated they saw promising approaches and strategies to embed in their own practice. They reflected on the ways these approaches enabled:

- A safe classroom environment for taking risks
- Student ideas to flourish and be shared
- Positive diversion and engagement of students who used ideas to disrupt
- Different modes of telling stories, assisting English as an Additional Language or low-achieving students to have success with their writing

'Lots of sharing of ideas, especially from kids who don't like to share'

– Teacher

Through the Theory of Change workshop, we saw that there were differing priorities and focus across the schools, and within teacher cohorts on the specific changes they were seeking. Each school also approached the Story Hub opportunity with different ideas about where it fit within their school improvement journey.

MEADOWS PRIMARY SCHOOL focused on the community strand, and saw Story Hubs as a whole-school opportunity to make students excited about learning through better links with the community and by providing a more inclusive experience for families, focused on Years 3–6.

COPPERFIELD COLLEGE identified student and teacher change as a priority, focusing on their Year 7 cohort, with teachers particularly feeling the need to 'be on the same page'.

SUNSHINE PRIMARY SCHOOL teachers wanted to support students to be risk-takers, and to move away from thinking about 'right and wrong' in their writing. Initially this involved the whole school, but then moved to focus on Year 5 and 6 students.

These were early indications that the model might look different in each school.

Conceptualising a Story Hub

Initially we intended to deliver two activities in this phase: co-designing the Story Hub space with teachers and students, and professional learning for teachers using a classroom narrative unit. Following their first sessions, teachers and leaders in all three schools decided to focus on creating their Story Hub.

We found that our approach of co-designing the space itself through a co-designed program of activities led to divergent implementation of the program in each school.

MEADOWS PRIMARY SCHOOL teachers integrated concept and design activities into a term-long Sustainability unit for their year 3–6 students, culminating in a Design Expo. Students from Prep–2 were also invited to join in the fun with teachers embracing the opportunity to play with stories and 'imagination experiences' in visible ways across the whole school. 100 Story Building facilitators supported teachers to design and facilitate these activities.

SUNSHINE PRIMARY SCHOOL teachers began with idea generation activities from Prep–6, then 100 Story Building facilitators worked directly with year 5–6 students and teachers to develop their concept. The students creatively consulted with Prep–4 classes through a set of round-robin idea generation activities.

COPPERFIELD COLLEGE selected a group of year 7 teachers and students to lead the design, with 100 Story Building facilitating. This moved to a working group of students who consulted with their peers, then developed the concept through a series of workshops.

'It's made me more aware to be accepting of all students' ideas or divert them in a positive way'

— Teacher

Through surveys, observations and reflections, we found that:

- Teachers reported high student engagement in the co-design approach, which prioritised their voice and agency to make decisions.
- There were early indications of positive teacher practice shift in accepting and using student ideas.
- Teachers experimented and took risks with creative approaches, with both positive and negative impacts on student behaviour.
- Teachers found it challenging to place the co-design process and design activities within existing curriculum and planners and to decide who would be involved.
- Teachers could clearly state what participating in Story Hubs might achieve for student learning, but were less clear on how it might affect their practice.
- Collaborative practice was still a work in progress at the schools and ongoing change implementation had created anxiety and fatigue for some individuals.

'It has required some additional time from a classroom and whole school organisation aspect. So other schools really need to understand the level of commitment involved.'

— Teacher

Design and build a Story Hub

Each school entered this phase with a student concept for their Story Hub, but these were (purposefully) imaginative and narrative-based. To support the design and build, we commissoned a set designer/maker to articulate and manage the creation of each Story Hub.

'Working group students were committed and engaged in a project that allows them to exercise their creativity and engage in critical thinking.'

— Teacher

We found that:

- Students made key decisions on the proposed design, and created artefacts for the space (phoenix feathers, guidebooks, dragon houses, signage).
- Teacher engagement in the design was limited, although their input into the useability of the Story Hubs was essential.
- Each school had families and community members who were keen and excited to support the build of the space and participate in working bees.

'I'm really proud of myself for contributing to something that's really big for the school.'

— Student, year 5

This phase provided opportunities for the wider school community to contribute, and we observed openness in teachers and leadership as each Story Hub took shape: they trusted the student ideas and were excited to see them realised. Students also showed increasing confidence in sharing their ideas for the space, and pride in their Story Hub.

'I'm very shy and can't contribute like some people, now I have a big team I can talk to them and get comfortable each day.'

— Student, year 5

WHAT WE LEARNED

We entered the Story Hubs partnership committed to collaboration and co-design throughout the program. For 100 Story Building, that meant we tried to leave as much space open for leadership and teachers to shape the program in their schools, and for them to make key decisions about the implementation. There was clear tension between the open, co-created ideas and structure imposed by classroom/school environment and curriculum. Facilitator reflections show that this approach needed more scaffolding and structure for individuals than we provided, including program materials and documentation to support implementation and decision-making, without losing the important aspects of co-creation.

A midpoint survey conducted between June and August show mixed responses from teachers about the potential and experience of the pilot as it related to themselves and their practice. Student engagement was a clear focus for teachers but their views on what was required in the pilot differed - some were hoping for inspiration and ideas to stimulate student writing, and others were considering their practice as a teacher. There were early signs that practice shift was occurring, particularly around supporting student ideas.

> 'When it comes to engagement, we all struggle in some way. Brings that sense of we're all in it together. Seeing our struggles, it's useful for students to see us doubting ourselves.'
>
> — Teacher

The conceptualising and design of the Hubs presented opportunities for students to write, but this was driven by individual teacher engagement rather than being a specific output of the program. Activities delivered or guided by 100SB focused on the generation of ideas and the converging narrative of the space, rather than individual student writing pieces. Given that this pilot was aimed at improving student engagement in writing, it is worth exploring how designing and building the Story Hub could be better embedded in this way. This was particularly important for the secondary school setting where we were working with the English team, with less support for cross-curricular activities.

> 'Students want to see us making the mistakes and modeling risk-taking'
>
> — Teacher

Teachers reported changes in student engagement, curiosity and excitement, particularly those students who participated in the concept, design and build phases as part of the working groups. These are promising indications for future impact, but it is too early to tell if these were sustained or substantial changes.

For the future model, we will consider changes based on these learnings including:

- More structured sessions/activities for the space co-design
- Prepare for more facilitated sessions directly with students
- See the Story Hub design and build as preparation for student agency in other areas
- Revise proposed teacher role and expectations in the design and build of the Story Hub
- Focus on space co-design and delivery in a shortened timeframe (6 months) and then move to teacher/educator professional learning

> 'Each site was unique and we were reacting to the idiosyncrasies and challenges of each as we moved through. It became clear that we were asking them to experiment with their teaching practice, while undertaking a process that they were unfamiliar with.'
>
> — Facilitator, 100 Story Building

We are excited about the next stage of the pilot, where we will work closely with teachers to support creative risk-taking in their students' writing.

PILOT PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

PARTNERS

Copperfield COLLEGE

Meadows Primary School

Sunshine Primary School

Banksia Gardens Community Services

SUPPORTERS

AESOP FOUNDATION

THE IAN POTTER FOUNDATION

H&L HECHT TRUST

THE SAMUEL NISSEN CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

THE ROSS TRUST

KING AND MCMILLAN FOUNDATION

HART LINE FUND

STAN WILLIS TRUST

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION'S ACF RESERVE FUND

AND OUR VALUED COMMUNITY OF INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTERS

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