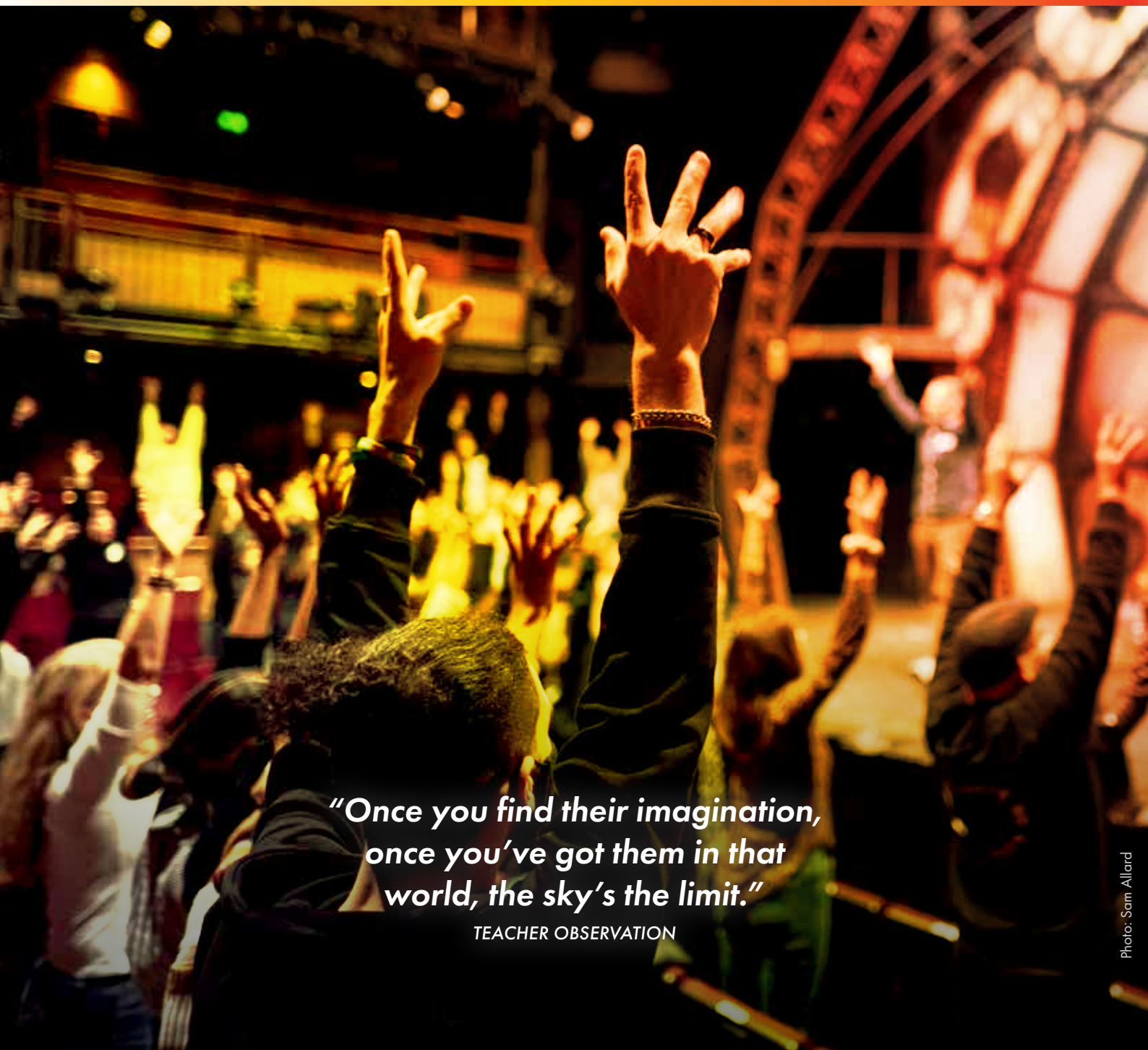




**...ON THE POWER AND IMPORTANCE
OF ARTS LEARNING TO CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE**



*"Once you find their imagination,
once you've got them in that
world, the sky's the limit."*

TEACHER OBSERVATION

Time to Act is a major research study exploring the difference that Shakespeare's work and RSC teaching approaches make to the language development and social and emotional development of children and young people.

The findings show positive impacts and contribute new insights into the difference that engagement with the arts and cultural education has on their lives.

The study consisted of two kinds of research methods:

- 1.** A randomised control trial (RCT) involving schools that had never previously worked with the RSC or used RSC teaching approaches.
- 2.** A teacher-led action research programme undertaken by teachers that have been using RSC approaches for several years.

Across both parts of the study, we used a range of existing and new impact measurements.

“Particularly boys who are disengaged, find their voice, pick up the pen and start to write. And I didn't hear ‘what's the point?’ anymore, [instead, I heard] that ‘this is fun and I really like it’.”

TEACHER RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

METHODOLOGY

RANDOMISED CONTROL TRIAL

- ▶ 45 state-maintained primary schools across England were recruited, all with above average eligibility for Free School Meals.
- ▶ None of the schools had previously worked with the RSC or used RSC teaching approaches.
- ▶ The schools were randomly assigned to either be in the intervention or control group.
- ▶ Teachers in schools receiving the intervention took part in five days of professional development with the RSC.
- ▶ Intervention teachers delivered 20 hours of Shakespeare teaching to Year 5 pupils using RSC approaches.
- ▶ Control schools delivered their existing curriculum and did not participate in RSC professional development.

Researchers then analysed more than 3,000 written responses from children in control and intervention schools over the 12-month research period.

TEACHER-LED ACTION RESEARCH

We worked with 14 teachers who had extensive experience of using RSC teaching approaches. The teachers were based in a range of schools across primary, secondary, further education and SEND settings. The research projects focused on groups of children that were not meeting age-related expectations or who were at risk of not meeting their potential in other ways.

The teachers undertook classroom-based research projects during the academic year 22/23. They used existing measurement tools as well as piloting new, inclusive measures aimed at capturing the impact of RSC teaching approaches and Shakespeare's language on literacy, wellbeing, and social and emotional development.

HEADLINE FINDINGS FROM THE RANDOMISED CONTROL TRIAL

IMPROVED LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

We applied a range of indicators that measure language development in children's writing by comparing writing produced by children in both the intervention and control schools. Both groups of children were responding to a character dilemma from a Shakespeare play. In 98% of those indicators, schools receiving the intervention outperformed control schools. The writing produced by children in the schools using RSC teaching approaches was longer, more detailed and more complex.

The children:

- ▶ **employed richer, broader and more sophisticated vocabulary, including**
 - **13.8%** more 'sophisticated' words (outside the 2,000 most commonly used words).
 - **24.3%** higher use of rarer verbs.
- ▶ **showed a better grasp of linguistic structures and devices, including**
 - **20%** more clauses within sentences and clauses at greater length.
 - **18.9%** greater use of complex sentences.
- ▶ **were better at writing in character and expressing emotion**
 - used **27.4%** more words relating to emotion.
- ▶ **demonstrated a broader understanding of abstract terms and descriptions**
 - used **6.7%** more abstract vocabulary (words relating to emotion, cognition and concepts outside of the physical world).

Our qualitative analysis of the writing showed that children in intervention schools:

- ▶ **produced more expansive descriptions of setting, place and atmosphere**
- ▶ **showed greater optimism and resilience when imagining character outcomes**
- ▶ **demonstrated better inferencing skills, imagining what might come next.**

While these findings are not yet generalisable to pupils' wider writing practice, they are strongly indicative of increased sophistication in language use.

INCREASE IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE

We also analysed the same young people's belief in themselves as learners, using a validated tool, Myself As a Learner Scale (MALS).

MALS is a validated measure of academic self-concept that has been used widely in Social Science research. MALS survey results showed that in comparison to control school pupils, children in the intervention schools exposed to Shakespeare and RSC approaches were:

- **17.3%** more confident in their ability to work out what to do next when stuck
- **13.8%** more confident with language
- **12.6%** more confident in taking a considered approach to tackling work
- **11.3%** more confident in their own ability as a good learner
- **9.9%** more confident in wider problem-solving.

HEADLINE FINDINGS FROM TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH

Fourteen pieces of in-depth action research were undertaken by teachers in primary and secondary schools, further education and SEND settings. All of them had extensive experience of using RSC teaching approaches.

- ▶ Teachers witnessed **substantial improvements in pupil writing**—in terms of breadth, depth, complexity and emotional literacy—alongside enhanced **speaking and listening skills**. This included children not yet meeting age-related expectations in literacy.
- ▶ Teachers evidenced **increased levels of wellbeing and engagement** in pupils, including those in SEND settings, those learning English as an additional language and those with multiple ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences).
- ▶ Teachers reported that RSC teaching approaches were **inclusive to all students**, providing a flexible and accessible model for arts learning across diverse educational contexts.
- ▶ Teachers reported feeling **valued and respected** by being given space to explore their practice as researchers.
- ▶ Teachers reported how their own professional identity had changed, with research now embedded in their practice.

“This is a wonderful way to widen vocabulary safely - children are using new words without even realising they’re using them.”

TEACHER RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

WHY THESE RESULTS MATTER

Research from the Department for Education shows a direct link between the enjoyment and frequency of children's writing and their attainment levels. The most recent National Literacy Trust survey (2023) shows that children's enjoyment of writing is currently at its lowest level since 2010 and that nearly half (46%) of disadvantaged 11-year-olds in England left school in 2022 unable to write at the expected level.

Time to Act suggests that the combination of Shakespeare's language and RSC teaching approaches leads to advances in the language development and proficiency of children, with positive improvements in the breadth, depth and complexity of the language used in creative writing. Crucially it also points to an increase in enjoyment and confidence with words and language, as well as attitudinal shifts in the children's perception of themselves as learners. The results suggest that children in schools receiving the intervention were better able to empathise; they showed greater resilience and creativity in the writing they produced.

"The language and vocabulary that the children were including in their letters was incredible."

TEACHER OBSERVATION

TIME FOR ACTION

The research results uncover a new understanding about the impact of RSC teaching approaches on young people. The measurement tools used show how and why this work makes a difference to teachers and children. We believe that the whole arts and cultural sector needs more tools and more research studies like **Time to Act** to help us better understand and evaluate the contribution the sector's work makes to the social, emotional and academic development of children and young people.

We recommend that:

- 1.** The arts and cultural sector work together to develop inclusive measures and a shared outcomes framework to enable better understanding of the impact of arts interventions on the social, emotional and academic development of children and young people.
- 2.** Investment is made in a centralised research hub for arts and cultural learning in the UK, sharing latest research and evaluation about how and why arts and cultural learning makes a difference to children and young people.
- 3.** Policymakers locally and nationally should recognise the impact and importance of an arts-rich education on young people's lives and embed arts learning in education policy and decision making.

School is a universal provision in the UK. If arts experiences and subjects aren't offered in school, some children will not experience them. Every young person has the right to benefit from an arts-rich education and these experiences must be offered by all schools.



“And suddenly, you’ve got children who are unwilling to speak who are talking... it’s so inclusive...”

TEACHER OBSERVATION

“They can all access it. And it builds their confidence, it builds their sense of self-belief.”

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“I work in another school and wonder why aren't we doing this? Because really, it should be an experience that every child is offered.”

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Full details of the randomised control trial and teacher action research can be found:

rsc.org.uk/time-to-act

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Foundation