

Executive summary

Creativity connects us and is vital to our nation's success. Research repeatedly identifies creative skills as essential to the 21st century professional skillset and workforces of the future. Creativity enables adaptability, experimentation and innovative thinking, as well as empathy and human connection in an increasingly automated and polarised world.

Creativity also plays a vital role in child development and education. Arts and creative activities can help students develop personal, social and cognitive skills that transfer to a wide range of academic and social situations and improve performance in their future careers.

Focused on creativity, **Creative Leadership in Learning (CLIL)** is an innovative Sydney Opera House program that embeds creativity in schools.

A flexible three-year program, CLIL brings the artistic resources and creative processes of the Opera House into the school ecosystem by increasing creativity, communication, collaboration, and curiosity in teaching and learning.

The program is a combination of professional learning for school principals and teachers, and collaborative creative projects between students and Opera House artists, developed in the classroom or online over a 20-week period.

CLIL is not intended as a one-size-fits-all model delivered the same way in each school. Instead, the program is delivered via a tailored approach underpinned by a methodological framework in each learning environment. This deep, longer-term and co-constructed method is seen as part of its in-built creativity and value for schools.

Within school communities, CLIL aims to increase the capacity for creative learning, supporting schools to develop the skills and knowledge required to increase engagement, build resilience, and equip students and teachers for future social and professional contexts. The program plays a critical role in demonstrating how creative skills and processes are innate, but often need to be re-learned or strengthened so that innovative thinking and collaboration can flourish.

More broadly, the program supports a shift in the Opera House's relationship with schools, from one that is largely transactional to one that builds capacity and creativity over time and which makes the most of all that the Opera House and its people can offer the education sector.

This research report documents the results of a collaborative research partnership between the Sydney Opera House and the Australia Council for the Arts. The research aimed to understand the impact of the CLIL program within schools on both learning and wider community engagement. It also explored the relevance of the program and the application of the lessons learned to the wider education and creative sectors.

Drawing on interviews conducted with principals and teachers from participating schools, and data co-created with the SOH CLIL team and its artists, the research found that CLIL had a wide range of positive impacts.

Impacts for teachers

For teachers, the program has increased engagement with their teaching practice, enlivening the curriculum and leading to new flexible experiences with students. Through participation in CLIL's 'teacher professional learning', teachers have enjoyed increased support and collaboration between colleagues, resulting in improved health and wellbeing. Teachers feel their engagement with CLIL has given them the opportunity to take risks and experiment with new approaches, allowing them to apply creativity and its processes in unexpected subject areas. Teachers talked about how CLIL has significantly repositioned the way they practise and understand their teaching. CLIL's creative intervention in schools has also led to new opportunities for leadership and mentoring, and an enhanced sense of trust within the classroom.

Impacts for students

Teachers, principals and CLIL artists also described the positive impacts of the program on students, reporting improved engagement and increased excitement for learning. Engaging with creativity at school has encouraged students to take risks, share their thoughts, and try new ideas. Additionally, a perceived growth in confidence was connected to the encouragement of risk-taking through creativity. Principals and teachers spoke about how applying creativity has the potential to impact the whole child – academically, socially and emotionally.

Impacts for families and communities

CLIL has led to increased parental engagement with both their children's schoolwork and with the school more broadly, enhancing a shared sense of community. Several interviewees spoke about the pride families felt seeing their children perform, especially during CLIL's annual *Amplified* festival at the Opera House.

Impacts on creative capabilities within schools

Within schools, CLIL has changed the meaning of creativity and its significant potential for learning across a range of academic subjects, not only those typically associated with the arts. The program is enabling schools to spark a conversation with families, students and other educators about the value of creativity in building new skills such as resilience and adaptability, which will be valued in a new, complex world of work.

Impacts for artists

For participating artists, CLIL has presented new horizons and stimuli for creative practice. Artists have experienced new contexts for collaboration, and even new concepts of what artistic collaboration might mean. For some, the program has created a new site for their artistic work, taking their studio to the classroom and, with that, opening a range of novel possibilities for producing work. For many artists, CLIL has also provided a new professional context for their practice, and an important new source of income.

The changing relationship between schools and the Opera House

CLIL has also promoted a new relationship between schools and the Opera House that is based on collaboration and a connection that lasts over time. Previously, students might have just come to the Opera House to see a show, but CLIL has engaged schools in far more meaningful and enduring ways. The program has increased students' sense of confidence regarding their own creative capabilities as well as their sense of familiarity with the Opera House. For many who might not have previously attended a performance, CLIL has cultivated a feeling of belonging and connection with this icon of Sydney cultural life.

This enhanced sense of trust between schools, students and the Opera House is a key outcome of the CLIL program, particularly given the program's efforts to help bridge the educational and creative sectors. Some schools describe the Opera House as becoming an extension of, or resource for, the school. Meanwhile, the Opera House is creating new, engaged relationships with communities, and audiences that will play an important role in the development of civic and professional skills for the citizens of the future.

Navigating challenges

So far, the program has had to navigate various challenges, including an inflexible school system, ensuring that key people understand the relevance and purpose of the program, and building sustainability and reach beyond the initial three-year partnership with schools.

A further challenge, identified by principals, teachers and the CLIL team, is the intentionally ambiguous and flexible nature of the CLIL program. There is uncertainty around the degree to which CLIL is a fixed model or something that can be tailored to the individual context and needs of the school.

A program like CLIL also challenges an institution like the Opera House in many ways. While the creative projects in schools often prioritise creative process and school needs, the schools' annual performances at the Opera House, as part of the *Amplified* festival, must conform to relatively strict production schedules and large-scale venue requirements.

Factors for success

There are many factors that contribute to the success of CLIL within schools. These include: the school's culture and leadership (the less risk averse a school culture or principal, the more positive the results), the degree to which the program connects to wider school objectives, and the degree to which a school is focussed on the skills required for future workforces. At the Opera House, CLIL has been enabled by a culture of experimentation and trust in the program's early positive implementation.

Looking to the future

Far from working in isolation, CLIL is only one example of how previously performance-focussed cultural organisations are moving into educational work, and reimagining themselves as community hubs of creative activity and/or creative specialists active in building civic capacity.

However, the future of CLIL will require ongoing exploration of the program's business model, and consideration of how to balance the twin needs of flexibility and standardisation. This is a question of quality, and one that sits at the heart of wider questions regarding how CLIL and similar cultural programs might expand while remaining dynamic, alive, and responsive to community needs.

Through a willingness to take risks and remain open to true collaboration off-site, the Opera House has been able to move very successfully towards more community-engaged work. As the Opera House advances the value of creative approaches for negotiating times of opportunity, challenge and change, the insights presented in this report should be considered highly relevant – both for the CLIL program, and for the broader educational and cultural sectors.