

Case study

Flunstellas: the future of learning at FACT



Photo credit: FACT

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Background

Flunstella > noun a thought constellation (*F*Locks/*c*LUsters/*co*NSTELLAtions)

FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) is the UK's leading media arts centre, based in Liverpool. The award-winning FACT building houses three galleries, a café, bar and four cinema screens, run by Picturehouse and showing the best in independent and mainstream film.

FACT's Schools and Learning programme explores the role creative technology and art can play across the curriculum by developing innovative and exciting partnerships that focus on creative technology, ICT and film. Every year, FACT works with hundreds of students and their teachers on a variety of educational projects all delivered by experts with their own artistic practice.

Flunstellas was a milestone project for FACT which took digital technology into the classroom and embedded it within curriculum-based learning. Working with Year 7 & 8 students from Weatherhead Media Arts College and emerging artist, Neil Winterburn, Flunstellas explored how the future of learning might look by imagining and building models of thoughts, emotions and memories as playable systems. The end result of this highly collaborative process was Charlie, a large-scale installation in the FACT atrium as part of the Knowledge Lives Everywhere exhibition.

Objectives

The main objectives were to:

- Strengthen relationships with the Education Sector
- Take digital practise and creative technology into curriculum based learning
- Empower teachers to use technology as a creative tool in the classroom
- Develop future producers, curators and creators through inspiring critical thinking and talent development
- Present the students' work alongside other artists and communities within the context of a major exhibition Knowledge Lives Everywhere

Target audience

The workshops were targeted at Year 7 and 8 students, and the exhibition itself was aimed at FACT's general audiences and other schools, students and staff.

Process

FACT, Weatherhead High School and artist Neil Winterburn worked collaboratively to develop the concept of the project. From the outset FACT's exhibition curator was closely involved to develop the concept of the work in keeping with the themes of the exhibition and opportunity for exhibition space. The school's Media Arts Manager ensured the project was firmly embedded in the curriculum through the concepts and delivery which all fed into the final artist proposal.

Students worked with Neil Winterburn over 8 weeks to imagine what their flunstellas, thoughts, ideas, memories and emotions, might look if we could see them. They focused on two typical classroom scenarios and examined how their flunstellas might interact with each other and how might this affect how we interact with each other? Through the project they:

- Used role play to examine how they interact with each other in the classroom
- Worked with clay to design their flunstellas
- Utilised new skills in 3D rendering to digitise their flunstellas
- Created playable computer games of their scenarios' and flunstellas
- Designed a set of rules to guide the behaviour of their flunstella
- Contributed to the design and installation of the exhibition at FACT

Following the workshops the artist worked closely with the curator and design & build team to install the work within the exhibition, bringing to life the creations of the students. The students and their families attended the exhibition launch to celebrate their hard work and stunning creations.

Outcomes

- Flunstellas was exhibited alongside world-class artists as a significant part of the Knowledge Lives Everywhere exhibition at FACT. The exhibition drew an estimated audience of 38,000. The exhibition also included a screening event for parents at FACT of the documentation and the artwork.
- All students involved in the project developed their digital skills. Teachers also developed digital skills and grew more confident in using creative technology in their teaching practice.
- The teacher reported students were more perceptive of one another's positions in the class after participating in Flunstellas and were more understanding of each other.
- A stronger more strategic relationship was developed between FACT and the school as a result of the project. The artist's practice also developed and was supported with engagement in further legacy projects.

Key points for effective practice

- The experimental nature of this project was a key factor in its success. It ensured a collaborative ethos between partners and departments from the start and regular evaluation throughout informed how the project evolved. This included interviews with film crew, regular checkpoint meetings with the project team, students' evaluation presentations as well as group screenings.
- The strong and open relationship between teacher, artist and FACT staff enabled the team's ability to be flexible throughout. The teacher was involved right from the beginning and developing the project from the schools and students' viewpoint offered excellent learning for the artist and FACT.
- Time was a significant issue for this project as the school could not break their timetable. Very early on in the planning stages, it was agreed that Flunstellas would be developed with students in short sessions after school. It was therefore vital that the artist plan around the actual project time available. The planning really helped ease this time pressure and FACT realised the value of carefully managing the artists' expectations of time available in workshops to carry out projects.



Photo credit: FACT

Conclusions and recommendations

Key reasons for the success of Flunstellas include:

- Close working partnership that existed between the teacher, artist and FACT staff from the start. It was a successful and valued partnership which underpinned the entire process.
- The project was totally embedded in the curriculum. This meant that the teacher was involved at every stage of the project from conception to realisation.
- Complete organisational buy-in on the part of FACT. Flunstellas was prominently displayed as part of the exhibition, and benefited from both technical and marketing support.

Additional Information

- [Flunstellas and the Future of Learning...? documentary film](#)
- [Knowledge Lives Everywhere](#)
- [Artist Fluntstalla Website](#)

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