

Unit 2: Case Studies

These notes have been taken from the document titled 'Business Plan' on this page on my digital space: <https://digitalspace.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/do/unit-1/assignment-1-2/>

Case Study – The Lewis School of English

There are no schools like CSL in Bradford or the general Yorkshire area. Therefore, I sought after schools located in England. One such school was the *Lewis School of English*.

The Lewis School of English is a private limited company based in Southampton, which teaches solely English. They teach two main age groups: adults (aged 16 and over) and juniors (aged 11 to 17). They teach English using theatre primarily to the juniors.

There is a team of around twenty employees working to ensure the school delivers what it promised, six of them being teachers. It was established in 1976, bought by Alistair Walker in the mid-1990s, the current owner and director of the school, from its previous owner. The school had already built a sizeable clientele, but it continued to grow when Walker took over. It was originally funded by business loans and student fees. Now, it earns mostly from student fees via all the services they offer.

They offer a wide range of services for a variety of audiences: face-to-face classes, online courses, teacher training courses, summer courses for juniors, English integration programmes, and more. Their *Theatre Express* programme is of particular relevance to CSL, as it teaches English using theatre. It is offered to both juniors and adults alike, with summer courses offered primarily to juniors. There are also tailored adult programmes offered, where the school comes to the required location to lead a course lasting between one and four weeks to produce a play with the group while teaching them the English language or improving their use and knowledge of it. These courses have taken place in several countries, like Russia, Spain, and the UK. This information has been sourced from the Lewis School website, which can be found in the bibliography.

They market their school using social media, like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, alongside their website. This is particularly important, as they seek students from all around the world to use their services, not only in the UK. Posters, leaflets, and brochures can only reach a certain audience for a certain time, but a bigger reach is required for a bigger clientele, and social media is an ideal way to achieve that.

On 11th December 2024, I held an incredibly insightful interview with Alistair Walker. I learned about the school's origins, the challenges the school has faced, their workshops, their demographics and more. I reflect more on our discussion in my Case Study Reflections and Analysis document, submitted alongside my Reflections Log.

In this interview, Walker mentioned the demographics they have worked with over the years. When he first took over the school, most of the students came from East Asia, namely Korea and Japan. However, as the years went on, more Middle Eastern and South Asian students joined. Because of the school's focus on teaching English, this is likely due to political changes, encouraging immigration to the UK. Walker mentioned this as just one of the barriers they have had to overcome. Therefore, this is a factor which must be kept in mind for CSL, as it teaches English, as well. This has been mentioned in the SWOT analysis. Walker also spent time abroad teaching English in multiple countries in Asia, contributing to the number of students that would engage in their services abroad and in the UK.

Regarding student age, their average student age has increased over the years. In the beginning, they had a mostly young audience, with students aged between 18 and 25. Though there are currently many students in this age bracket, the school has seen an increase in older students. This change in student age reflects my estimations of student ages at CSL: the first months and/or years will see mostly younger students, but as time goes by, older students may begin to join.

It is clear to see that a large part of the school's success comes from their business model: a PLC. A business that has a PLC model has fewer restrictions on the prices they can charge, the activities they can offer, and more. The same cannot be said for CIC model companies, like CSL. This is why I am interested in exploring what CSL would look like as a PLC. Walker also mentioned how they were very fortunate in timing with the business loans, students, locations, people and beyond. This has certainly played into their success, but it does not mean that such success cannot be replicated with circumstances not as fortunate as theirs. Other factors that have contributed to their success include: the wide range of quality services they offer, Walker's teaching and marketing trips abroad, and their marketing team which has ensure word of the school is being spread as far and wide as possible. These are all factors which must be considered when progressing with the development of CSL.

Investigating the Lewis School has raised very intriguing questions and ideas regarding CSL, which are discussed in more depth in my reflections on this interview. Researching the Lewis School of English has proved to be very informative and inspiring, forming a good guide for continuing to construct the plan for CSL.

Case Study – Big Wheel (Theatre in Education)

Big Wheel is a theatre-in-education company based in London, which travels around the country, as well as abroad, to deliver their school shows. The main language they teach is French. The following information has been retrieved from a document published by Big Wheel, titled *Frequently Asked Questions*.

It is a partnership run by three main staff members, among them Jeni Williams and Roland Allen being partners. They employ plentiful freelancers, as well as four to six actors, and directors specific to each project. They do not receive any additional funding, apart from their profits, their work often being paid for as a single fee, relative to the project they are being asked to carry out.

They were founded in 1984 by students from Oxford University doing fringe theatre, their aim being to deliver theatre workshops and shows to children, especially in schools, around the London area. However, due to changes in the National Curriculum at the time, precisely the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act, working in schools was a challenge, and so they moved their work to Europe. This was until 1997, when they returned to work in the UK after their school workshops became significantly more expensive in Europe.

In the early 2000s, they began to work with the National Health Service, providing staff training and conference presentations. Since then, they have developed many kinds of workshops for schools discussing different topics, alongside further services. For example:

- Workshops teaching Shakespeare;
- Themed workshops discussing themes like road safety and climate change;
- *The Big Book Show*, consisting of workshops introducing GCSE students to reading books critically;
- *Meaning in the Mud*: a workshop exploring the cultural legacy of World War One;
- A wide variety of training opportunities to improve presentation skills, as well as training for healthcare environments, particularly in relation to management.

Regarding their approach to devising workshops, Big Wheel says the following, "We ask a question... and try to answer it, using drama as our method of communication." (p. 6). This is not something yet considered for CSL, but it is something that must be. The current plan is to write plays discussing almost anything, not restricted to certain concepts or ideas. However, perhaps writing plays which answer certain questions about culture may be something to explore, especially topics like immigration and politics if a large portion of the English students will be asylum-seekers and refugees.

It may inspire more passion and motivation in those students to continue attending practical classes to play a part in such important stories.

With services for several young age groups, alongside valuable skills training for adults which is useful in any industry, this wide range is simply one of the reasons for their success. They have multiple ways of advertising their school, which helps them spread the word about these services. Their three main forms of marketing are: mailshots, free shows, and word-of-mouth. Previously, I knew of the importance of word-of-mouth when promoting new businesses, but I had never heard of sending mailshots as a form of publicity. This involves sending appealing information about the business to relevant venues to make them aware of your service. Since Big Wheel mainly work in schools, they prioritise sending mailshots to schools in certain areas and even whole countries. This is an interesting concept which has proven helpful in securing more work, as is said by Big Wheel. It is therefore something that must be considered for future advertising methods. However, they do also say that such a method of advertising can be very costly, as their mailout to schools in Germany cost over £17,000. Though they were able to compensate for the cost after a while with the work they secured after the mailout, it was still a deep cut into their budget. This is unlikely to be a wise investment for the very first six months of a social enterprise with a new method of teaching.

The other reasons for this enterprise's success include their intriguing range of services; their location, which is a famously creative hotspot, the capital city of England; as well as their flexibility and adaptability, as demonstrated by their return to the UK after facing financial difficulties abroad. These are elements of the business which have contributed to its success, some of which may also have been aided by fortunate timing, like having a successful run in Europe before facing financial difficulties. This helped them build their repertoire in advance of settling in and searching for work in the UK.

Researching Big Wheel Theatre Co. was very insightful, providing new ideas to explore and new ways of looking at certain aspects of CSL. I reflect more on how this case study can influence CSL in the Case Study Reflection and Analysis document.

Bibliography

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Case Studies (Reflections and Analysis)

These notes have been taken from the document titled 'Case Studies (Reflections and Analysis)' on this page on my digital space: <https://digitalspace.bradfordcollege.ac.uk/do/unit-1/assignment-1-2/>

There are no companies or schools like the Creative School of Languages in the local area. Therefore, the two case studies have been drawn from other areas around England. The *Lewis School of English* is based in Southampton, and *Big Wheel Theatre Co.* is based in London.

The Lewis School of English

On the 11th December 2024, I held an interview with Alistair Walker, the founder and owner of the Lewis School of English, an English language school, based in Southampton, which partly teaches the language using theatre. We discussed the beginning of the school, the challenges faced along the way,

the challenges they face today, how their workshops are run, where the idea came from, how they are funded, and more. It was very insightful, and highlighted new aspects to consider when making the business plan.

The school was previously owned by another person, but Mr. Walker bought it from him. It had already built a good clientele, and raising prices would have risked losing a great deal of clients.

The Lewis School is a PLC, meaning they make a profit from what they earn. Walker discussed his past interest in making the school a charity but realised that it would be of no benefit to him. It is very clear that this school is designed for more financial gain, but that does not deter its impact on the local community. Walker described the variety of students who attend their sessions, and how they use marketing to attract a certain audience. In the beginning, their target audience was young people, aged 18-25, and it continues to be so now, with more, slightly older students. As I have mentioned previously throughout my work, this is likely to be the case for CSL, particularly because it is in one of the youngest cities in the UK.

In relation to demographics, Walker reflected on where their clients come from. When he first took over the school in the mid-1990s, he found that a great deal of students came from East Asia, namely Korea and Japan. However, over time, more students have started arriving from the Middle East and South Asia. He linked this to increasing political tensions and war in those parts of the world, once more demonstrating the politics behind teaching languages, and how it can affect business.

Furthermore, I was rather surprised to learn that their theatre approach is directed more towards children, as they have found that it is children who work best with such a method of teaching. Though they do offer a *Theatre Express* course for adults, it is not as accessible as it is for children through this school. This further consolidates my assumption that, despite a very open demographic, it is likely that more children and young people will be involved than those aged over twenty-six. However, this does not mean that no efforts will be made in my enterprise to encourage older groups to learn languages creatively, as well.

Another point of interest was the resources they used when setting up the school. Firstly, the school was already set up before Mr. Walker was the owner, meaning start-up procedures were not a task he needed to undertake, and no initial finances were a serious worry. However, with it being the 1990s, there was no access to the internet for answers to simple questions. He therefore had to account for accountant fees, legal fees, training fees for training which may be available online for free today, and more. This is where my enterprise could have a strong advantage, already seen through the tutorial sessions being online for the first six months to save on rent costs, as well as finding a person involved in a similar enterprise, never mind the owner of one!

Regarding finances, though he had a good sum left from the previous owner, he continued pursuing different banks for business loans, but most kept saying no, until he found one willing to loan him a sufficient sum to continue the school and improve it. He also mentioned how, when buying a property in which to run a business, there is more potential to invest in it, bringing a further source of profit in the long run. The bigger and nicer a school, the more professional and reputable it becomes, thereby making it more appealing to future investors and customers. He also mentioned how fortunate timing helped the school flourish, as well as his previous trips to different countries, where he built a clientele, encouraging them to learn English with him.

Their focus as a school is on teaching the English language, and not solely through theatre. This is another way in which my enterprise idea differs from the Lewis School: I seek to teach languages primarily through theatre, tutorial sessions being there as support for students to gain the language level needed to take part in the practical sessions. Also, though CSL will also be teaching English, this will not be the sole language it teaches. I seek to expand the range of languages offered as the school grows. However, when hearing Mr. Walker discuss the political impacts on their school, I begin to

wonder if perhaps teaching more than one language may reveal the school to a greater risk of sudden influxes and effluxes of clients. On the other hand, perhaps it may be the opposite, the diversity of languages offered may appeal to Bradford locals, seeking to learn a language for leisure. It is likely that learning English specifically is more politically relevant, especially in an English-speaking country, but seeing as though the purpose of this school is to celebrate and teach languages of all kinds, this may not be as much of an issue.

Regarding teaching, the school has only six teachers, out of a total of roughly twenty staff members. This was rather surprising to discover, as the school seems to be more popular and sought-after, leading me to assume that there may be more teachers than that. This may be due to funding, as was discussed in this interview, as well, how the effects of politics, and particularly COVID-19, impacted their income. This may be something to keep in mind when planning the finances for CSL. Though the school has been running since the 1970s, and as a PLC, being non-reliant on external funding sources, they still face financial issues. After having set a target of ten teachers employed in the first two years of the CSL running, it may be worth reconsidering this. However, instead of looking for ways to avoid having issues with funding that could *affect* our number of teachers, it may be more positive and more inspiring to look for ways to *ensure* we do have ten teachers!

The key languages of CSL will be Spanish and English for the first six months because these are the languages most likely to attract students in the local area. Though there will be a focus on English in the beginning, I do not believe political tensions would cause much of an issue, as there are many people currently seeking English teaching who have lived in the area for a long time. However, another dilemma regarding this that Walker discussed was students who feel their level of English is good enough, and so they think spending money on lessons is worth their time. This is affirmed by the easy access to vast amounts of ESL resources online, meaning almost anyone with internet access can teach themselves English in a relatively short time. This can also apply to any languages in general. If a person can learn a language online, why spend money to have someone teach it to them? Especially at a time when many language teachers make videos online, meaning even the teaching aspect can be accessed for free. However, this may be an issue for traditional language schools, but not for a language school which teaches through theatre. The experience is not the same, the opportunities that arise are not the same, and the level of language acquired is incomparable.

He also discussed the effects of politics on their clientele. Understandably, when teaching English, most students will be from foreign countries. This means immigration will impact student numbers constantly, especially in periods of political divide, when immigration skyrockets. Or, on the contrary, doesn't change at all, or decreases. Walker gave several examples of this: the impact of the Gulf War (which occurred at the very beginning of Walker's takeover of the school), Mad Cow disease, and Brexit, alongside COVID-19. It was COVID-19 especially that set the school back by several years of progress, as it led to a massive decrease in client numbers and engagement. They are still recovering from its impact today. This is also related to some advice he gave, saying, there is not much purpose in making a business plan, especially a plan which extends beyond 3 or 4 years into the future. In such a business, anything can happen, both for the good and the bad, and so making estimates is not the smartest approach. In response to this, he also highly recommends taking risks, especially financial risks when undertaking such an endeavour into an experimental way of teaching a traditionally academic subject.

A particular phrase that stood out was, "turnover is vanity, profit is sanity", as Walker talked about his past interest in making the school a charity. This means running a CIC may be more appealing to viewers of the business, to potential funders, but is far more difficult than running a PLC. Though I am keen on keeping CSL a CIC, I am now slightly curious to see what the school would look like if it was a PLC.

Overall, the interview and learning more about the school from the inside was very insightful, and I truly learned a lot about what it means to run a language school, and it inspired me to think about different aspects of the business plan in new ways.

Big Wheel Theatre Company

Despite my efforts to arrange an interview with this company, one has not yet been arranged. However, in their care for those researching theatre-in-education institutions, they have published a document on their website, titled, *Frequently Asked Questions*. This is where I have sourced a large amount of information about the company.

Big Wheel is a partnership, with two of its central three employees being partners. It is funded entirely by profit, earned through the services they provide. Their range of services is rather wide, and so is their geographical reach, as they are based in London, but have travelled to work around Europe, as well. Their business model is rather different to the Lewis School, making it an intriguing case study, due to the comparison that can be made between them. For example, Big Wheel has a stronger focus on theatre, and less focus on language teaching. The Lewis School has a stronger focus on teaching English, and a weaker focus on using explicitly theatre to do so.

An interesting aspect of Big Wheel is that they do not have a mission. Whereas CSL and the Lewis School seek to teach in this creative way, Big Wheel seems to simply deliver their skills and knowledge to whoever is willing to participate, with a stronger focus on schools when it comes to their language-teaching services. Every business owner's inspiration and intention for their business can be different, but for CSL, I believe the lack of a mission statement would lead to misunderstandings of the nature of the school and the services it offers, not only for potential students, but for myself, as well. Looking at the feedback left for me by my peers after my presentation for Assignment One, the mission statement I currently have could be elaborated on more, and this is something I will be working on in the coming weeks.

Despite the business model being different to that of CSL, this document answers many of the questions most relevant to those I have regarding my own business plan.

One of these questions is, how do they decide what amount to charge per project? They break it down by asking two key questions: what is the client prepared to pay, and how much do they need to charge in order to make a profit? They place priority over the practical costs, such as materials and travel, publicity, and of course, staff wages, alongside unexpected costs, such as costumes or expert advice for a specific project. Their business model is rather different to that of CSL in that, they work project-by-project, with regular school workshops, whereas CSL functions like a school of its own, running weekly tutorial and practical sessions to build up students' language skills and knowledge. At Big Wheel, their focus is on putting on and involving children in productions to encourage their language learning. However, they also offer tailor-made programmes for schools. This is a rather interesting idea, something which I am rather curious about, as it is an ideal way of achieving the language-teaching goals of CSL (encouraging young people to learn languages). It is also an opportunity to make an additional profit to support the school and its functions, as well as a wonderful opportunity for publicity.

Towards the end of the document, they leave a small but loud piece of advice: "Give people what they want". This encouraged me to reflect once more on the services CSL is offering, what kind of people would most be interested in it, and how can that group be expanded? Or rather, what needs to be changed with the school in order to attract a wider audience? The answer to the latter question is simply to wait and see as the school progresses. As Walker said, such a business is unpredictable, so it could be that from the beginning we have an older audience, or a bigger audience than first anticipated. In any case, it has been made clear by both the Lewis School of English and Big Wheel, among other companies, that publicity and marketing are vital for a business to thrive. This confirms

the need not only for posting advertisements online, but an entire marketing campaign to build the foundations of CSL in stone and not in sand, hence a marketing manager being one of the very first staff members to be employed. It is also through marketing that we will be able to learn more about the clientele, which is most interested in the school, via analytical data supplied by the advertising mediums.

However, one of the main ways Big Wheel publicise themselves is by offering free shows to schools. This is an idea I am quite interested in, and I have considered holding outdoor shows in very public areas, to demonstrate the beauty and potential of such a method of learning languages. This is something I will be considering into the budget as I continue to develop the business plan, particularly because it was suggested once more by my peers in their feedback on my business plan.

Big Wheel's struggles with the changes in the National Curriculum at the very beginning of the company remind me of the issues that the Lewis School of English experienced, regarding the influx and efflux of student numbers and student backgrounds, depending on political climates. No school or business in this industry is entirely protected from the consequences of political changes, especially a company like Big Wheel, who go beyond the borders, and offer their services abroad. However, on a more positive note, there is potential to offer our services to schools, to compliment the national curriculum. In lieu of teaching languages in this way, distanced from regular schools, it may be an interesting endeavour to break that barrier, and in the process, teach more children and young adults languages in such a fun way, showing them that learning languages does not have to be difficult!

Reflecting on the services and business model of Big Wheel has also been insightful, particularly when reflecting on how it differs from the Lewis School, which seems more 'grounded' in its ways, while Big Wheel is more flexible. It has taught me new concepts and brought to my knowledge new factors to consider when developing the business plan for CSL.

Conclusion

Researching these case studies has been only of benefit, as the plethora of ideas that were in my mind for CSL before having been made more realistic, which has helped ensure that the business plan is realistic, as well. The range of services and different approaches of both schools have led me to consider new ways of delivering the services of the CSL, as well as the kinds of services the CSL could offer. For example, offering skills development and training opportunities alongside focusing on language teaching, as well as offering services abroad. Both schools have spent time outside the UK, which has evidently encouraged their growth and development, not only abroad, but in the UK, as well. This experience contributes to the school's reputation and the trust potential students will have in the school. Therefore, one must ask, should CSL do the same? This is a question which must be researched further down the line, to consider the impact on and demands of the budget, and how such work abroad will only contribute to the sustainability of the school, while keeping it open and accessible to as many people as possible, of any background.