

# Associate Schools Programme, 2005/06 Academic Year

## Outline

This case study explores how Creative Partnerships London East began in 2005 to explore how best to share its practice and develop models for disseminating learning. The programme described advocates for a model of practical continuing professional development for teachers and schools new to approaches to creativity, partnership, and cross curricular practice.

## Introduction

Eastside Educational Trust has been established in east London for more than ten years. It aims to introduce young people to arts and literature and to raise standards of achievement in language and literacy through participation in the creative arts. Although it also runs national and international projects, it mirrors the area in which it is based, working with young learners from many ethnic, religious and social backgrounds, and making sure that the adults who work with them are equally representative of the changing population of London. Eastside also has expertise in working closely to develop the skills of adults who work with young people and support their professional development. Eastside's skills lie in working with the schools' priorities and also with the experience the schools have of managing creative projects and external partners as a starting point. Through meticulous planning and careful support of both the creative practitioners and the teachers in the schools, Eastside facilitates a safe and creative space for the partners to discuss the project, plan and to take steps into the unknown.



The four schools that feature in this case study are not obviously similar to one another, apart from being situated in east London. One essential common feature, however, was their commitment to this programme, and their capacity to take on new ideas, to welcome visitors to the school, to draw on their skills and to place students' learning at the heart of the school's purpose.

St Edmund's Primary School, Tower Hamlets is of average size and, according to the 2005 Ofsted report, experiences 'a high degree of social disadvantage' with above average figures for children with English as an additional language and with special educational needs. Ofsted described it as 'a very good school [which] meets the diverse learning needs of all pupils'.

St Andrew's Primary School, Islington is a smaller than average school that is emerging very successfully from an earlier period of disruption and difficulty. It has halted a decline in numbers and is dealing well with the fact that attainment on entry has been well below average, with many children having little pre-school educational experience. (Ofsted 2004)

Berger Primary School in Hackney was described in a recent Ofsted report (2006) as 'a good and continually improving school... [with] some outstanding features'. It 'is a larger than average primary school, in an area of substantial economic deprivation... and around two thirds (of pupils) come from families where English is an additional language...over a third of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities'.

Langdon School in Newham is a Sports College for students aged 11 to 16. It is described by Ofsted (2006) as 'a very large school serving areas of significant economic deprivation. Well over three quarters of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and most of them have a first language other than English... The proportion of students having a statement of special educational needs is above average'. It was judged by Ofsted to be 'outstanding' and has also received two Artsmark Gold Awards.

## The Associate Schools Programme

The words 'associate schools' in the title of this programme are full of meaning. This was not a programme in which things were done for schools but one in which adults with many kinds of skills worked and planned together to enrich young people's learning. Its aim was not restricted to the immediate effects of this specific programme; it was hoped that, by taking part, schools would acquire a broader and deeper sense of how partnerships between creative practitioners and schools can influence (and perhaps even help bring about) whole school change.

All schools in Hackney, Islington, Newham and Tower Hamlets that had not worked with Creative Partnerships before were invited to apply to take part in the programme, resulting in 22 schools being selected. Applications were designed to support schools in analysing their strengths and weaknesses and in determining what support would be helpful and whether this programme would have a real impact.

The programme began with an Inset day for the coordinators (the Creative Partnerships lead teacher) from each of the participating schools. They divided into two groups in connecting rooms and swapped over to ensure that everyone experienced a range of activities during the day. Activities included performance poetry, visual arts, film and drama workshops.

The day finished with a plenary session in which teachers were invited to consider how they might introduce new ideas of creativity into their schools, leading on to the next phase of the programme.

Each Creative Partnerships coordinator met with a representative from Eastside to plan a programme of Inset for their schools that would meet the needs and interests of their colleagues and address its strengths and requirements. While each school managed this phase in its own way, the outline was essentially the same, and involved the completion of planning forms. Practitioners from Eastside spent time in schools, either providing a one-day Inset event for teachers or working directly in classrooms as artists in residence, using their artistic medium to approach a particular area of the curriculum. In classrooms, they led a demonstration session, then a follow-up session sharing leadership with the teacher, and finally took part in a class led by the teacher, offering practical support as and when it was needed.

St Edmund's Primary School chose the Inset day, in order to kick-start a Creative Classroom Curriculum. All the adults in the school took part in two workshops with Jared Louche, a performance poet and Dawn Fleming who specialises in voice, drama and movement work. With Jared they explored ways in which poems might be read, written or performed, emphasising pleasure, variety of style and freedom to play with the elements of language. With Dawn, they used the school hall to try out ways of dramatising stories such as We're Going on a Bear Hunt, using techniques like freeze frames and swapping roles between narrator and performer. Teachers and classroom assistants then met in groups to devise plans for putting these experiences to practical use.

St Andrew's Primary School had three artists in residence, all linked in cross-curricular work on topics within history. Melissa Beagley worked with a year 2 class, using cartoon methods to tell the story of Martin Luther King. They learned drawing skills and how to sequence a visual narrative. Kai Fierle Hedrick worked with a year 3 class on an imaginative account of Boudicca and the Romans. They used word games and word stores to expand their vocabulary for speaking and writing. Steph Kehoe worked with a year 4 class on a dramatic version of aspects of the life of Elizabethan mariners, with drama games leading to a series of expressive and informative tableaux.



At Berger Primary School, Nina Gebauer joined a year 1 class using three-dimensional approaches to work in art. This was linked to a study of structures and materials that already formed part of the class' scheme of work and led to the creation of clay and papier mâché objects. Melissa Beagley showed year 4 pupils how to use textiles to create a striking visual memento of a Chinese story – the school has links with Beijing. The exploratory techniques included sketching and the portrayal of feelings in drawing and the outcome was a huge lion displayed in the hall. Year 5 pupils worked with Charlotte Bill using photography in a history project looking at how Hackney has changed since Victorian times. They investigated archival pictures and made new ones, re-occupying where possible the original locations and re-using the camera angles of their hundred-year-old forerunners.

Because a large secondary school is organised into separate faculties, the approach at Langdon School had to be different. Lottie Bailey brought her expertise in drama to a collaboration with Delene Gordon, the head of dance. Lottie worked with students on the theme of Swansong, a topic already in the school's dance curriculum. She showed how drama activities, ranging from the development of dialogue to the stage effects of flocking and mirroring, can be used in a dance activity and then developed into a piece involving movement and music but no words. Juleka Nwankwo, a dancer, worked with the drama teacher Kim Jobling in a comparable undertaking. Juleka taught students dance sequences for an ongoing scheme of work called Freedom. This allowed movement routines to become integrated within a larger piece of drama, adding a new dimension of bodily discipline and control to a staged event. Charlotte Bill, a filmmaker worked with James Devlin in the art department. She showed students how to use cameras and audio recordings to create 'a sound-track to my life' and how to edit a sequence of blended sounds and images.

## Impact and Outcomes

The initial Inset day was well organised and well received. It flowed smoothly, was continually enlivening and brought people together to form new and useful networks of friendly colleagues. The support materials produced by creative partners were practical and thought provoking. Participants wrote on evaluation sheets about what they were leaving behind and comments included: 'fear of drama'; 'reluctance to act'; 'my lack of knowledge'; 'fear of the arts'; 'the idea that I cannot teach poetry'; 'some of my inhibitions about teaching drama'; 'doubt'. More positively, they also wrote about how they felt at the end of the day and what they were taking away with them and comments included: 'motivated, eager and ambitious'; 'a desire to be more creative myself'; 'a keenness to get started'; 'a sense of excitement'; 'a sense of anticipation'; 'something that will raise standards'; 'a time to talk and plan next steps'; 'direction, unity, ideas'. One acting headteacher called the day 'inspirational' and reflected: 'I've done it – now I must do it with my staff. It's a wake-up call for us all'.

As is evident from these responses articulated in the dead of winter, Eastside provided something of the hope of spring, backed up with a promise that could be realistically fulfilled. Some teachers immediately tried out activities with their own classes such as syllabic games leading to poetry writing.

St Edmund's Primary School felt that their involvement in the programme would work best with small groups of teachers and classroom assistants developing ideas from their Inset session, combining topic planning with boosting confidence in cross-curricular work – 'freeing minds to take an idea onwards'. They also wanted to be able to involve pupils more directly in planning what they learn next, an idea strongly in accord with current concepts of 'formative assessment' or 'assessment for learning'.

The Inset day was very successful. 'Jared showed us how to turn simple things into poetry'. He used a number of stimulating verbal forms and formulae that pupils could complete in countless ways, and 'showed how we could use an object to get imaginative writing going and (perhaps most important of all) how we needn't be called to a halt by mistakes or by taking a wrong direction but can learn from them'.

The drama work was equally stimulating. 'You had to be involved and just do it. Adults had to be like children and feel what it's like'. Learning was quick and energetic – 'you made the story your own and found out what that's like for children. Everyone lost their inhibitions – that meant we found out how we could use what we had done'.

There was a lasting effect. Teachers and classroom assistants planned work in the class that would embody the things they had learned and promote the feelings they had shared. 'It's so much better to plan together when you're full of positive thoughts than to sit alone at your computer. I can see the children beginning to burst with words'. Confidence took a practical form: 'You could feed it straight into your planning, doing things that before you thought you wouldn't do'. Teachers are now sharing 'what works and what to do differently' at staff meetings, devising entry points for creative activities within existing schemes of work. One teacher has added a drama with shipwreck and buried treasure to work on a Pirates topic, getting pupils to add their own new story lines and contribute descriptive scenarios. Another has made a poetry tree as part of a Paper topic, hanging writing from different branches like Shakespeare's Orlando. Others have found new uses for the interactive whiteboard and for ICT, making hen-like robots for acting out the story of Rosie's Walk.

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The value of the day doesn't diminish in hindsight. 'It would take a lot for another Inset day to live up to this standard. It'll be fertilising our ideas for a good while to come'. Non-teaching staff are far less sceptical about the notion of creative learning now they have seen it in practice. 'Teaching Assistants see there are more avenues open'. Even more important is the feeling that the school contains many renewable possibilities for creativity. 'We now can work without the support of the artists. It works. And we have a key idea as a staff: Don't have secrets. Let the children in on it too!'

Teachers from St Andrew's Primary School enjoyed their part in the programme and looked forward to using what they learned. They liked the way children could 'show their knowledge and understanding' through the use of freeze frames in drama, they anticipated using word stores and vocabulary pots with future classes and were pleased to have acquired new skills themselves while watching children 'exploring their artistic sides'. One teacher warmly recalled his pupils working with the artist: 'Their eyes were glued to the board'. Another spoke of how her young class overcame their initial uncertainty about a new style of literacy lesson – 'Have we done writing yet?' – and came to realise that lots of speaking and listening and word games actually helped their writing to improve. Words like inspiration and captivating came out in describing the presence of artists in the classroom.

The St Andrew's Primary School acting headteacher saw the Associate Schools Programme as a refreshing part of the school's successful move away from a poor Ofsted report four years previously and as part of its commitment to raising standards and helping pupils 'learn how to learn'. She welcomed an approach that 'used the strengths and creative skills we know teachers have', especially in a small school where collaboration between colleagues is very much the norm. Recently qualified teachers have usually met very few examples of creative teaching and learning and this programme 'gave them a license to explore'. One young teacher 'became an apostle to the staff', leading a staff meeting and eagerly sharing what had happened in class.



The programme fitted happily into existing procedures, giving carefully tested plans a new dimension. 'We keep the success criteria we already have but we develop a more creative approach to them. We're still rigorous in the value we give to learning, but now we can support pupils in a variety of styles of learning'. The school frequently uses mind maps in classes, and the programme 'became one way of joining strands in the mind map and using it as a teaching tool'.

There were some thoughtful suggestions as to how the programme might have been improved. There was a risk that non-speakers would be bored during periods where only a few pupils dominated the speaking/listening activities, and some static points had to be inserted into a drama session that at one point became almost too enthusiastically vigorous. The real message however is that the programme 'enabled teachers to learn and to reflect, as they were able to take on what the artists offered in the light of their own professional knowledge'. For the school, 'this is the way we want to go'.

Staff from Berger Primary School were eager to make visual art the main feature of their part of the programme – 'it's not something we've been good at or confident about. We see strong possibilities in visual literacy and we want Eastside to help us find them'. The school hadn't found the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's schemes of work for art helpful; the Associate Schools Programme offered an alternative that could 'support teachers who need some help as well as teachers who've got some confidence but would welcome new skills.' The coordinator explained: 'Schools are at last breaking out of a dry curriculum – we'd like art to be more central to everything we do'.

The programme involved some changes to existing plans, but nothing that couldn't be accommodated within a flexible primary curriculum. The sculpture project meant moving work on materials forward within the year's timetable. This, however, was seen as a positive step. As the teacher said: 'It's about me learning as well as the children. So far, my art teaching has been too cut and dried, with too little investigation'. It also involved thoughtful discussion between teachers and artists about how to document the projects and report on them to the school, with class assemblies, digital photographs and whiteboard presentations all part of the plans. These negotiations were essential to the success of the programme. For example, the important idea of 'drawing from imagination as well as drawing from looking' emerged as the teacher and artist made their initial plans.

The importance of communication was also clear as the project developed. One creative partner was described as 'very thorough – she explained everything very well'. The teacher was confident about demonstrating to the class parallel to hers how everything had happened. The processes involved were as important as the products. Seeing the growth of the big Chinese lion came about gradually: 'I couldn't see how it would work at first, but it appeared slowly and in the end it was brilliant'. The partner learned too: 'making a finished shared piece isn't something that artists often do, but in school it's more commonplace'. Parts of the photography project were not as innovative as the teacher had wished. It resulted in a fine display, but she didn't feel she learned as much as her pupils did. Partners and teachers need to be entirely frank throughout about what they expect and what they can offer one another. However, Berger Primary School feels very positive about the programme. 'We want to continue our partnerships. We feel confident that there are many more opportunities for us to work in this way in the future'.

Teachers at Langdon School work within separate departments but have a history of successful cross-curricular projects. The Associate Schools Programme was welcomed as another way of sharing skills from different art disciplines. It's a hard concept, to convey character in dance and the dance teacher anticipated learning from an unfamiliar discipline, looking at two ways of getting to the same point. She hoped that 'we will get more depth, working in a more open-ended way'.

Her hopes were fulfilled. 'I was pleasantly surprised by the way the students could access ideas at a deeper level. Lottie had an understanding of dance as well as drama and her suggestions were very productive, things we could immediately use. I wanted a lot more than three sessions!' She was especially pleased that students were able to use the new ideas and develop them on their own, embodying character in dance movement rather than restricting themselves to mime. The organisational difficulties of a huge school remain, but she feels closer to the work of the drama department than before and 'I'm much less afraid of the other art form. And the students know how to perform a movement that links scenes together'.

The drama teacher relished the new ideas brought by the programme. 'Students tend to use Eastenders as their model for drama. This was a great method of drawing them away from a naturalistic mode and exploring ideas of ritual and dream and formalised movement'. It also introduced technical concepts like canon and repetition that can be used in all kinds of work in the future. 'They wanted to add movement sequences to subsequent lessons. They loved it, including the boys – which I hadn't expected'. 'Students' diet of TV and Hollywood films can be very limiting. But they already know a bit about dance and now they see

how it can be an integral part of drama. It's a possible way into expressionism'. The discipline of the body also provided students with a valuable new experience: 'They now realise that stylisation often leads paradoxically to freedom of expression. It's adding a lot to their repertoire'.

The art teacher at Langdon School welcomed the Associate Schools Programme: 'An outside partner is always welcome – it's fresh and exciting when you inject something new. Working with a video artist made students aware of their environment but it was good for me too. It was exploration, with a feeling that came as much from the art world as from school'. He liked the sense of discovery and the refreshing challenge to his professionalism: 'You're not ticking boxes because you don't know what the boxes are'.

He also appreciated the fact that students themselves understood and enjoyed a challenge to their understanding of art. 'It's their project, it's for them. One's doing it in Spanish. They're expanding their sense of what art and design can be, it's not just about getting an improved grade'. Students who most fully grasped the idea of a sound track to their life began to experiment with a new expressive form. 'They're not being caught up on well-trod paths'.

More broadly, the art teacher found that 'it made me feel like an artist again. Working with another adult means you have more pleasure in working with the students. They feel that you're enjoying it too'. The most committed students have continued to work on their films despite the growing pressure of coursework for exams. Nonetheless, they have been editing, adding music and customising the sequences for themselves; so has the teacher. 'It's inevitable that 'there's a feeling of loose ends to some of it, because in three sessions you can't do everything'. However, the ideas developed in this project will feature in other units of work, sometimes as opening activities, sometimes central to the entire unit.

The Associate Schools Programme gave schools, both those who were accustomed, as well as those who were unaccustomed to cross-curricular ways of working, an additional framework to engage and integrate creativity successfully. By giving the participating teachers the responsibility of planning their activity in partnership with the artists, teachers were able to have an immediate impact and were able to develop a greater understanding of how to begin to implement bigger changes in their approach to the curriculum.

One comment from the art teacher at Langdon School might stand as a summary of the entire Associate Schools Programme: 'A new way of doing things is an intervention of energy'. And, as Blake (who was born in London) wrote: 'Energy is Eternal Delight'.

**Tom Deveson**





In October 2008, the three London Creative Partnerships teams (London East and South, London North and London West) joined together to become **A New Direction**, a new independent organisation delivering Creative Partnerships' three new programme strands (Enquiry Schools, Change Schools and Schools of Creativity) in schools across the capital, and extending its reach to 21 London boroughs. The organisation is also looking to develop other strands of work outside of the Creative Partnerships programme. For more information about A New Direction visit the website – [www.anewdirection.org.uk](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk)

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**Creative Partnerships London East and London South** were established as two of the first sixteen Creative Partnerships areas in 2002. Delivering programmes with schools in Hackney, Islington, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, they merged in April 2006 to form one Creative Partnerships area delivering a joint creative programme in those eight boroughs.

The programme placed creativity and imagination at the centre of teaching and learning, working across the whole school curriculum, and exploring different ways of working together and making meaningful change through long-term partnerships between educational institutions and creative individuals and organisations.

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**Acknowledgements:** Thank you to all the contributors to this case study especially the schools, partners and the Creative Partnerships London East and South team.

**Photography:**  
Melissa Beagley  
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