

CASE STUDY

Creative Teaching and Learning
Hannah Wilmot

Foreword

Creative Partnerships began in 2002, as a way of bringing together schools and practitioners from a wide range of creative backgrounds to collaborate on innovative projects for children and young people.

As the delivery agency for Creative Partnerships in London, A New Direction has seen thousands of young Londoners develop their creative skills, and engage in their learning in new and exciting ways through taking part in the programme.

As Creative Partnerships comes to a close, and A New Direction gears up to take on a new and strategic role for children and young people and the arts in London, we present this set of Case Studies to celebrate the programme, exploring the themes of: creativity and change (looking at whole-school change), co-construction of learning, staff development and learning, creative teaching and learning, and outcomes for the 21st century (looking at outcomes for young people).

A New Direction would like to thank all of the students, teachers, school staff, practitioners, and Creative Agents who have given so much to the programme.

Congratulations on all you have achieved.

Steve Moffitt, Director

Introduction

A recent Ofsted¹ report evaluated creative approaches to learning. One key finding stated,

'In schools with good teaching, there is not a conflict between the National Curriculum, national standards in core subjects and creative approaches to learning... These examples were accompanied by better than average achievement and standards or a marked upward trend.'

This case study explores how Creative Partnerships' Change Schools programme has supported the development of creative teaching and learning in three schools: one primary, one secondary and one special school. The study is based on project observation and conversations undertaken with young people, senior leaders, class teachers, Creative Partnerships Coordinators and Creative Agents in spring 2011. Additional evidence is drawn from project documentation completed by the schools' Coordinators and Creative Agents.² The study focuses on projects undertaken in the final year of the programme.

3 schools x 3 years

St Margaret Clitherow RC Primary School, Brent

St Margaret Clitherow is a one-form entry primary school. There is a wide cultural mix and the proportion of students with additional needs is well above average. In 2008, Ofsted judged the school to be good with outstanding features.

In the first year of the Change School Programme, St Margaret Clitherow explored how children learn through a whole-school project rooted in Assessment for Learning (AfL). The project was inspired by the work of Peter Senge and his theory of learning organisations.³ Creative Practitioners used Senge's theory as a framework⁴ to stimulate learning opportunities and support personal and group reflection.

In the second year, the school determined to trial a cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning, focussing on two classes (Year 1 and Year 3). Working with dance, drama and visual art practitioners, these classes explored world knowledge and Australia respectively. The project brought together geography, art, science, dance, history, English and maths. The project was evaluated positively with clear gains for teachers and children. In the third year therefore, the aim was to embed this approach across the school.

The project ran throughout the spring term 2011 and comprised two related strands; curriculum design and curriculum delivery:

Marlene Wylie, an Excite consultant, worked with children and staff to develop a customised creative curriculum map. Marlene introduced the project during a twilight Inset for staff and at an assembly for children. She spent a day visiting all 8 classes, consulting children and gathering their ideas to feed into the whole-staff Inset day. On this day, staff worked collectively to produce a topic-based

Enquiry 2010/11: How can we facilitate learning through creative thinking?

curriculum map that incorporated relevant visits and visitors, and cross-referenced with National Curriculum objectives. Progression (a key concern identified by teachers) was highlighted throughout.

The school undertook an audit amongst staff to identify areas where staff lacked skills and confidence. Informed by this audit, four practitioners from All Change (a dancer, film-maker, musician and poet) worked with each class teacher to develop creative planning and delivery of a short project linked to the new curriculum. The projects provided staff with an immediate and supported opportunity to trial topic-based cross-curricular teaching.



Chingford Foundation School, Waltham Forest

Chingford Foundation School is a large 11-18 comprehensive school. It has combined Specialist School Status in Art and Humanities and was judged in 2007 by Ofsted as satisfactory with good features.

At Chingford, the Change Schools programme has focussed on ways of embedding creative teaching and learning across the school, to improve students' engagement and achievement and move the quality of teaching from good to outstanding. In the first year, eight teachers from six departments⁵ worked with creative practitioners on specific schemes of work (SoW) that needed development. The project resulted in a bank of curriculum resources and the formation of a Teaching and Learning Council comprising five of the Heads of Faculty at the school.

The second year focussed on learning styles and learning spaces and involved a high level of student voice. For example, following an exploration of preferred learning styles, a group of Year 9 students created a film on the subject that was screened for staff during an Inset session.

In the final year of the programme, Chingford opted to consolidate practice at the school whilst also developing links with two feeder primary schools. Practitioners from The Change Collective worked with the Heads of Music, Art, Design Technology and Media Studies, and a dance teacher to plan and deliver creative projects in the primary schools. Practitioners worked with the teachers and students at Chingford initially and students in dance and music went on to teach in the primary projects.

Enquiry 2010/11: How do we work together to nurture creative teaching and learning?



Cambridge School, Hammersmith and Fulham

Cambridge School provides for students (11-16 years) with moderate learning difficulties and complex needs. Each of the 100 students has a statement of special educational needs. In 2010, Ofsted reported, 'Cambridge School provides an outstanding quality of education and a very rich learning experience. It is a vibrant and progressive school with a 'buzz' around the place'.

For a number of years, senior leaders at Cambridge School explored how student-led pedagogies could be adopted at the school. In 2006/07, supported by consultants from Sightlines Initiative⁶ a small group of staff visited the world-renowned preschools of Reggio Emilia. The principles and practices of Reggio Emilia inspired the development of enquiry-based learning within the school and informed the vision for the Change Schools programme. Multimedia theatre designer and live artist Cherry Truluck worked with the school throughout the Change Schools programme. Consultants from Sightlines have also provided additional support for project evaluation.

Each year, the school has altered the focus of the project, gradually inducting all members of staff (including Teaching Assistants) into creative, collaborative approaches to learning.

Cherry Truluck worked with two Year 8 teachers and their classes (15 students in total) on a cross-curricular project. The project took the film *Mirormask*⁷ as its 'provocation' and sessions took place weekly throughout the spring term 2011. A wide range of resources allowed students to make individual choices about how or if to engage with the project. Part way through the term, one student wrote a film script and this became the focus for the remaining weeks: making costumes, creating

Enquiry 2010/11: How can we develop Creative Learning and Resources for the future?

characters, composing music and rehearsing.

There was an emphasis on documentation (through film, photographs and written observations/ conversations recorded on post-it notes) to make young people's learning visible. Time was set aside for Cherry, the teachers and Teaching Assistants to meet after each workshop to share and reflect on experiences. Documentation was reviewed and analysed to ensure that students' ideas and actions informed the direction of the project. Cherry also consulted all staff at the school to gather ideas about the format and content of a resource to be produced to support ongoing development at the school.



What is creative teaching and learning?

During case study conversations with school staff, it became apparent that terms linked to creativity were subject to a variety of interpretations and applications. To avoid confusion, it is useful to define common terms in use.

Creative curriculum

A carefully planned, thematic approach to teaching and learning designed to support children's natural curiosity and stimulate their creativity. The curriculum is child-centred and has an emphasis on skills (before content), typically linking the foundation subjects and science.⁸

Cross-curricular teaching

Based on individual subjects and their connections through authentic links at the level of curriculum content, key concepts or learning process, or through an external theme.⁹

Creative teaching

'Teachers using imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, exciting and effective... This is a necessary part of all good teaching'¹⁰

Teaching for creativity

'Forms of teaching that are intended to develop young people's own creative thinking or behaviour... Teaching for creativity involves teaching creatively.'¹¹

Ofsted report,¹²

'Teachers were seen to promote creative learning most purposefully and effectively when encouraging pupils to question and challenge, make connections and see relationships, speculate, keep options open while pursuing a line of enquiry, and reflect critically on ideas, actions and results.'

Senior leaders and Coordinators in the schools were asked, 'What does creative teaching and learning look, feel and sound like?', Their responses included the following:

You will hear a 'buzz of activity' and see young people:

- practically engaged (individually and in groups)
- working harder than the teacher
- motivated and interested in what they are doing
- asking questions (of themselves, their peers and teachers)
- able to explain and enthuse about what they are doing
- collaboratively learning (young people in groups and young people with teachers)
- experimenting with new ideas, new materials, new processes etc
- reflecting on their learning and progress
- being listened to and valued

You will see staff:

- acting as facilitators, empowering and enabling young people
- exploring and learning with young people
- asking open ended questions
- having a lesson idea but not a rigid lesson plan
- actively listening to students.

Outcomes

At the time of writing in June 2011, schools had yet to undertake their final project evaluation and this study therefore draws on midpoint reflections. Outcomes varied across and within schools. A number of common areas of impact emerged however and these are listed below with (a small sample of) supporting evidence.

Outcome for students

Solving problems

During the midpoint evaluation¹³ at St Margaret Clitherow, one young person in Year 4 said they felt motivated by the fact the activities were hard but once they had worked out what to do, they found it quite easy.

'[The students] are finding ways around problems and are developing the ability to ask questions [to help find solutions].'

(Year 8 teacher, Cambridge)

Improved social skills (including teamwork and communication)

At Cambridge one teacher cited a recent trip to the park where he observed an improved group dynamic; more harmonious relationships. He attributed this improvement to the Creative Partnerships project.

The Head of Music at Chingford reported on the success of the project in which a Year 9 class became teachers for a Year 3 class. 'It was very empowering for my students. They lost all sense of inhibition - astonishing - just got on with it. They were perfect!'

Taking risks and experimenting

A teacher at St Margaret Clitherow reflected that

by taking risks, children could be transported somewhere really exciting and magical and that this empowers children and boosts their confidence.

'We are making them more resilient; less upset by change; more willing to try.'

(Chingford Coordinator)

Independent learning

The music project at Chingford worked with rhythm which allowed students to be in control, manipulate and create; to make choices and investigate.

Co-construction of learning

Co-construction of learning (between students, practitioners and teachers) was a successful feature of all three projects.

'Our design teacher was quite good because she got stuck a bit and we had to come along and help her and we were all working together.'

(Year 9 student, Chingford)

'Sometimes we would suggest something, and sometimes the kids would suggest something and we would work on that idea together.'

(PE/Dance teacher, Chingford)

Reflecting on learning/critical thinking

During the project at Cambridge School, one student withdrew from the main activity, electing to build a 'shed' as an alternative. During the final reflection session, when asked what he would do differently next time, he replied, 'Boring! Next time I would do what I want to do - go to the playground!' He continued, 'How are we going to learn by acting?'

Without prompting, other students responded enthusiastically:

'Actually listening to people.'

'Getting more involved.'

'I was acting much better than last time; more confident.'

'Understanding other people.'

'It would make him feel better about himself.'

At St Margaret Clitherow, the older children taking part in the mini projects were very clear that the practical experiences of the project were reinforcing and deepening their learning. They enjoyed being able to reflect on what they already knew and also learn new things.

Outcomes for school staff

Teacher as facilitator/Asking open questions

The teachers involved in the Cambridge School project, commented on their growing confidence, skills and understanding of the approach. One teacher, for example, reported 'having greater confidence to facilitate rather than teach and to ask questions that will help the students find ways to problem solve and reflect on what they are doing.' (Midpoint evaluation)

Teachers at Cambridge and St Margaret Clitherow talked about needing to get used to a more chaotic feeling in the classroom; allowing students the time and space to explore, take ownership. A Key Stage 1 teacher at the primary school, involved for a second year in Creative Partnerships, reported that she could now 'let go a bit more' and recognised that children gain in confidence as 'they bring more of themselves' to their work.

Planning and progression

The Coordinator at St Margaret Clitherow reported a change in teachers' approach: They now ask 'where do these children need to go next?' Not, 'two weeks of shape because... we always do two weeks of shape!'

Each year at Chingford, significant changes have been made in how teaching and learning are planned and organised. The SoW format was re-written in year one and now includes a section outlining creative learning strategies; year two resulted in teachers increasingly using learning styles as the basis for class groupings; and in the final year, the lesson planning template was redesigned to include two columns, *what are teachers doing? and what are students doing/learning?* (Formerly, the focus was on the teacher).

Taking risks

'Marlene's expertise in curriculum innovation has given staff permission to challenge practice and take calculated risks in how they address barriers to more integrated and creative ways of working'. (Midpoint evaluation, St Margaret Clitherow)

Teachers in all schools reported the experience of relinquishing control and entering on a joint learning journey with students as 'risky'. At Cambridge for example, students' behaviour can be challenging and unpredictable. Staff have seen the benefits however of students having agency over their learning, as one described, 'It all seemed quite chaotic in a way...quite fractured...and then suddenly it started to gel.'

Reflecting on teaching and learning

The Headteacher at Cambridge School is committed to developing reflective practice amongst her staff. The Sightlines consultants introduced a 'Creative

Reflective Cycle' to support the development of 'a thinking structure to support a creative and reflective approach to teaching and learning.'¹⁴

At the midpoint evaluation, the Head of Music at Chingford reflected on concerns she felt about whether the students could explain the skills they used when improvising during the project. After further reflection, she questioned whether this was more about her own anxieties and 'hang ups' relating to discrete teaching and wondered whether sometimes it may be better to 'just get on and do it.'

Motivation and enthusiasm

The Headteacher at Cambridge School asserted that 'Creative Partnerships has fundamentally changed how teaching and learning is understood.' Change has been incremental for staff and it has been the observed impact on students that has been the turning point for many. The Headteacher described her 'golden moment,'

'In the first year [of the Change Schools programme], I went into the classroom of a teacher who had rejected this approach for three years. And he did engage - his enjoyment, thrill, enthusiasm for what the children were getting out the project... changed him and his work for ever.'

Conclusion

Evidence from these three schools (relating to successes and challenges) reveal a number of factors required for a school to successfully embed creative teaching and learning:

- A clear commitment to and belief in the benefits of creative learning.
- A curriculum that promotes cross-curricular links and opportunities for independent enquiry.
- Flexible timetabling to facilitate extended project work.
- Ongoing opportunities for staff to take part in experiential professional development.
- Partnerships with creative practitioners to extend the learning of students and staff.
- A culture in which risk-taking is embraced.

Critically, all these factors require the active support and engagement of senior leaders at a school. In the report quoted at the start of this Study, Ofsted noted

'The key to success in promoting creative learning lay with the quality of the leadership and management. In the schools where creative learning was outstanding or at least good, the school's leadership could demonstrate how it had carefully and consistently put in place the required culture and conditions.'

Although individual priorities and approaches vary, evidence suggests that senior leaders at these case study schools are working effectively to promote and support creative teaching and learning.

Endnotes

1. Ofsted (2010) Learning: creative approaches that raise standards.
2. Freelance creative project manager responsible for managing the process of a creative partnership within a school.
3. Senge, P. et. al. (1994) *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*.
4. *Comprising: knowing yourself, knowing the rules, imagining success, working together and making connections.*
5. English, Design Technology, Drama, Food Technology, History and Special Educational Needs Support.
6. Sightlines Initiative is the official UK Reference agency for Reggio Children, Reggio Emilia, Italy.
7. A fantasy 'quest' drama.
8. From guidance for schools in North Somerset.
9. From: Jonathan Savage (2011) *Cross-curricular teaching and learning in the secondary school*. London: Routledge.
10. National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (1999) *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*, London: DfEE.
11. *ibid.*
12. In Learning: creative approaches that raise standards.
13. Structured formative evaluation facilitated by Creative Agents during a Creative Partnerships project.
14. Deborah Jones and Liz Elders, *Reflecting on the Reflective Cycle*, article in *Refocus Journal*.

A New Direction

A New Direction is an organisation that works with and for young Londoners, providing powerful ways for them to access the best of arts and culture.

We do this by working with London's creative and cultural sector, schools and other partners, to generate more opportunities for young people to take part in arts and culture and develop their own creativity.

Through our work, more young people are able to develop their own talents and passion for the arts, and we are committed to helping more young people to identify, experience and move into careers within the creative and cultural sector.

From Spring 2012, we will take a strategic lead for children, young people and the arts in London, working alongside Arts Council England, and in partnership with Apples and Snakes, the Lyric Hammersmith, the Roundhouse and Sadler's Wells.

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