

Cross-curricular Creative Projects

Outline

Cross-curricular work offers a creative way to incorporate all strands of learning, developing the knowledge, skills and understanding of students while motivating them to learn through stimulating, wide-ranging and interconnected topics. This case study explores what cross-curricular practice looks like in three primary and one secondary Creative Partnerships settings. It describes the role of the creative partner, explores what is sustainable and articulates the benefits and challenges of this approach to teaching and learning.

Introduction

This case study considers cross-curricular creative projects in one secondary and three primary schools. All four schools have been involved with Creative Partnerships since 2002 and for the primary schools the projects were also a whole school initiative or formed part of a whole school initiative. The projects all took place in the spring term January to March 2007.

Teachers in all the schools commented on the benefits of using creative practice to work across curriculum areas: 'the learning has more impact because of this approach', 'the children will remember what they learned for longer', 'students get very boxed in and think that you only learn maths in a maths class or English in an English class; it's good to break down those walls and realise you can learn any subject in any classroom'.

In its 2003 publication, 'Excellence and Enjoyment: A Strategy for Primary Schools'¹, the (then) Department for Education and Skills said: 'As well as giving them the essential tools for learning, primary education is about children experiencing the joy of discovery, solving problems, being creative in writing, art, music, developing their self-confidence as learners and maturing socially and emotionally. Our goal is for every primary school to combine excellence in teaching with enjoyment of learning.' In the secondary as well as in the primary schools covered in this case study, students and teachers rose to the challenges of using creative projects to take a journey of discovery through different areas of the curriculum.



1. In June 2007 Department for Education and Skills (DfES) became the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

The Schools

Islington Green is an average-sized secondary school where boys outnumber girls. It serves a mixed neighbourhood, with areas of significant social and economic disadvantage. Almost half of the school's population is of White British heritage with the remainder coming from a variety of ethnic groups. Two in every five students speak languages other than English. The percentage of students identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities is above average. Students' attainment on entry to the school is significantly below average. ...The most significant area of strength is in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In these and some other subjects, many students make consistently good progress due to good teaching and a well-planned curriculum, although standards remain below average. (Ofsted 2007)

Islington Green School's recent Creative Partnerships projects have become more focused and coordinated than earlier ones as the school learnt that this approach resulted in more embedded learning.

Monega Primary in Newham is a three-form entry school with a roll of approximately 600 serving a diverse multi-ethnic community. The immediate area from which the school draws its pupils is one of high socio-economic disadvantage. When pupils start in the nursery, the skills and knowledge they have are well below that typically seen at this age. Almost all the pupils are from a minority ethnic heritage and speak English as an additional language. Achievements and standards are good overall and teamwork is a strength of the school. (Ofsted 2006)

Monega Primary School has an established relationship with street arts company Emergency Exit Arts and developed a proposal to work with them again on a project that developed and was stimulated by previous Creative Partnerships work.

The 300 or so pupils at Dalmain Primary School in Lewisham come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds with over a third having English as an additional language. About half of them have learning difficulties or disabilities which is well above average, as is the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. This is an outstanding school where pupils' achievement is exceptional and their personal development is outstanding. Children enter the nursery with low attainment particularly in language and social skills and make good progress because of the provision in nursery and reception. (Ofsted 2006)

Dalmain's previous projects with Creative Partnerships have focused on exploring the school's nature garden by using art and literacy, completing a creative introduction and assessment of each class/class teacher and delivering an after-school drawing club.

Gallions Mount Primary School in Greenwich has approximately 400 pupils from age three to eleven with a fairly even balance of boys and girls. Eligibility for free school meals is high as is pupil turnover and, overall, children's attainment on entry to the school is well below average. Thirty-five different home languages are spoken; a third of pupils speak English as an additional language. This is a good school where pupils of all abilities and backgrounds achieve well, reaching average standards, as a result of consistently good teaching. (Ofsted 2005)

Gallions Mount Primary School has a long history of working with visual artists to explore the environment, in the school and beyond. For its 2006/07 Creative Partnerships project it decided to explore a performing art (music), while retaining an environmental theme of local and global importance: water.



The Projects

	Dalmain	Gallions Mount	Monega	Islington Green
art form(s) used in project	Drama	Music	Visual arts, dance, drama, music	Art installation
arts partner	MakeBelieve Arts	Trinity College of Music	Emergency Exit Arts	Kinetika
curriculum areas covered	Design & Technology Citizenship Drama English Geography History Music PSHCE	Art & Design Citizenship English Geography Music PSHCE	Art & Design Design & Technology Drama English Geography History ICT Music	Art & Design Design & Technology Maths Science
year group(s)	Years 1 and 2	Whole school – Nursery to Year 6	Whole school – Nursery to Year 6	Year 7
number of pupils involved	87	424	650	24
number of teachers	3	19	30	2
number of teaching assistants	3 (+ 6 parents making set and costumes)	17 + 2 Bi-lingual Classroom Assistants	16	0

Islington Green School

At Islington Green School, Head of Maths, Rachel Anderson and Art Teacher, Monique Outteridge who is also the Creative Partnerships coordinator worked with four artists from Kinetika, an international arts company based in London that undertakes design, production and performances of site specific, celebratory, carnival, outdoor events. The project involved a class of 24 year 7 students who created and erected a scaled version of the solar system in the school hall; the project covered art and design, design and technology, maths and science curriculum areas and was delivered in eight sessions, four of one hour and four full days, plus an after school sharing to teachers and some parents.

The maths objectives for the project were to know and use the formulae for the circumference of a circle, use units of measurement to solve problems in a variety of contexts, convert between measures of length, enlarge shapes using a fractional scale factor, and be familiar with numbers expressed in standard terms. Rachel explained: 'we had three lessons where we talked about scaling and ratios and the use of pi to find the circumference. We made a scaled circle and demonstrated that the difference across fits three and a bit times the outside but in a very intuitive way of introducing pi rather than it being a magical number'. The students made the scaled circle by moving the classroom tables together to create a large surface area, covering this with paper then passing round a pencil attached to centre of the table by a length of string.



Dalmain Primary School

Dalmain Primary School has a whole school initiative to improve pupils' speaking and listening skills; for example, outside its Creative Partnerships' programme years 3 to 6 have been working with the National Theatre to address this development. For its 2006/07 Creative Partnerships project, years 1 and 2 (a total of 87 children) worked with MakeBelieve Arts, a theatre and education company who are highly experienced in engaging with all ages of children using drama and theatre techniques to complement their learning in school. Creative Partnerships coordinator and one of the class teachers on the project Zosia Rumistrzewicz identified that the theme of toys could cover many areas of the curriculum and together with MakeBelieve Arts decided on the story of Ruby (a teddy bear whose paw is stamped with 's' – for second and not for special as she believes) which was known to many of the children as the way to link these areas.

MakeBelieve Arts delivered 20 sessions to pupils, two Inset sessions (one for the three teachers involved in Ruby, and one for the whole staff team) and one planning and one review meeting for teachers. It also managed the two project performances, one to the school's 250 pupils and 15 teachers and another to 120 parents and siblings.

MakeBelieve Arts ran drama and music lessons one session a week and the class teachers covered the other curriculum areas. In history they looked at toys of the past, in design and technology at winding mechanisms and moving parts, and in geography they considered the differences between town and countryside because the story of Ruby is set in both. Six parents were also involved making the set and props for the performances.

Monega Primary School

Creative Connections was a collaboration between Monega Primary School and Emergency Exit Arts one of the UK's leading street arts companies who produce celebratory events, participatory projects and unusual spectacle. Creative Connections set out to have pupils, teachers and artists working and thinking together to create exciting lessons in history and geography, using the cultural and visual artefacts displayed on the school's four themed staircases – one for each of the continents of Africa, Asia, America and Europe. The staircases were originally developed by the school and Emergency Exit Arts as an art installation funded by Creative Partnerships in 2003, to improve the school environment, display the pupils' work and enrich the curriculum.

The project was delivered through one whole school Inset day, two planning sessions per year group, one performing arts workshop per class and one visual arts workshop per year group followed by two evaluation sessions per year group.

Every year group was paired up with a performing arts practitioner and a visual artist/maker. The artists devised a concept that would link the requirements of a lesson exploring a particular curriculum topic to a journey to the staircases to find a visual stimulus for their topic. Teachers used planning, preparation and assessment time to devise their sessions with artists and follow-up with further discussion to prepare lessons incorporating the artists' ideas. The aim was to produce a lesson plan or template (of various creative techniques) that teachers could use for their topic and refer to when making future plans.

The nursery pupils had the opportunity to work with a dance practitioner and a sculptor on the topic of Living Things. After the planning session, artists and teachers chose to narrow the focus to mini-beasts and animals. The pupils observed the Asia and Africa staircases in the main school to discover different art works inspired by flora and fauna. Reception also looked at the creatures and plants on the Asia staircase to explore the topic of Growth, with a storyteller and a designer/maker.

Year 1's topic was Our School/Journeys which they worked on with a dance artist and a model maker, using all four staircases. Year 2 pupils focused on the American staircase to explore the topic Here and There with a storyteller and a maker. For the topic of Invaders and Settlers, year 3 worked with a drama practitioner and mosaic artist, focusing on the Romans and the Europe staircase. The Asia staircase was the inspiration for Year 4's topic People and Places, delivered through working with a visual artist and a sound artist. Year 5 studied World War 2 and the Europe staircase through visual arts and drama for the topic We'll Meet Again. The time dedicated to year 6 was limited due to preparations for SATS, however they did some work with a visual artist on Victorian Britain.

Gallions Mount Primary School

The Making Waves project at Gallions Mount Primary School was delivered by Trinity College of Music through Raising the Roof, Trinity's music education programme for schools in Greenwich and Lewisham. The project aimed 'to enthuse, inform and encourage children and adults alike in developing confidence in composition, to support structuring and shaping original work for sharing and performing'. The whole school took part using an overarching theme of water. Five Trinity music leaders with a range of skills and experience of working with different age groups went into the school in order to structure the work appropriately for different classes. They have compiled a resource file with lesson plans and activity ideas to support teachers in continuing with the work without input from professional musicians.

A total of three Inset sessions were delivered, eight planning meetings with teachers, 50 workshops sessions and 16 performances to other classes and teachers in the school took place.

The school's previous Creative Partnerships work had all been based on visual arts and the suggestion to focus on music came from teacher and Creative Partnerships coordinator Julie Asquith. While the school does a lot of singing and some instrumental work, Julie recognised that they needed support in delivering the national curriculum on music: 'none of us is a music expert and the terminology for the national curriculum is quite complex for non practitioners to understand and what it means in proper terms in terms of children's learning'. She felt they also needed support with organising music in (open-plan) classrooms and to know how to manage composition, one of the more abstract and sophisticated aspects of the curriculum. The central theme of water was

convenient and unifying because of the possibilities it represented throughout the curriculum. 'It comes into science, geography, in measures. I knew everybody would be able to find something to do with water even if it was just stories and poems and songs. ...And because music is essentially about cooperation, it's about listening, it's about taking other people's opinions, it's about achieving a consensus – it's all of those things that are fundamental to citizenship and personal, social and health education'.

Each class worked with a musician to create and perform an original piece of music, based on the central theme of water. Younger pupils worked with stories they knew, creating a musical accompaniment to the telling of the story or writing poems that, with the help of the music leader, were set to music. At nursery level, the learning was in terms of the music curriculum and more widely in terms of social skills and giving pupils confidence with communication. Teachers observed that some pupils found it easier to sing something than to say it and described one pupil who found it difficult to express himself as he could not sequence words properly but who could do this when singing.



Impact and Outcomes

Making the scaled circle was clearly a memorable experience for the Islington Green School students who talked about it when interviewed four months after the project. Head of Maths, Rachel Anderson was impressed by the impact this physical activity had: 'Even weeks later lots of them remembered that activity and remembered that it was pi. ...I will encourage people to do pi in that way definitely. Ordinarily we do it on the whiteboard but I think the whole very physical experience was really a fantastic one'.

As well as covering the maths objectives and learning new artistic skills, the students talked about the planets of the solar system including their names, temperatures, relative sizes and the order in which they circle the sun. They also talked about team-work and cooperating – 'the best thing about the project was helping and working together' – and a number said they felt more confident because of the different relationships the project required with students, staff and the artists. They enjoyed meeting the artists and the fact that there was more than one teacher working with them: 'It makes it easier. When you are asking for the teacher's help, there is usually only one teacher and the teacher is usually across the room helping someone else. You had more teachers to help you'. The project culminated in a sharing of the work to other teachers and a few parents. Their solar system remained on display in the school hall for a further term (in part because it was too large to move out the door) so was seen by many more parents, students and teachers at end of year activities taking place in the hall. Rachel and Monique felt these sharings of the work were vital, allowing the students a sense of pride in their achievement. Students were enthusiastic about the way of working, 'you're learning through fun' and liked moving around and doing/making 'getting sticky' rather than sitting at a desk. They thought there was potential for other cross-curricular projects that combined maths, science and arts, for example making a giant person.

The Dalmain Primary School pupils developed creative skills, their grasp of narrative structure and ability to tell a story using description, traditional phraseology, binary opposites and satisfying conclusions. They were encouraged to become more confident in using their speaking and singing voices and to generate their own ideas about telling the story. The teachers were initially nervous of allowing the pupils to create the script for the performance but ultimately felt that this was its major achievement. Teacher, Sarah Rose remarked that: 'These children owned it and designed it and did it all completely themselves which for that age group is fantastic'.

Zosia Rumistrzewicz from Dalmain Primary School said that she was certainly using the techniques passed on by MakeBelieve Arts in her teaching 'It has really worked. It's brought on their story writing a lot. The boys really need that more physical hands-on approach through role-play and trying to experience it through the character'.

The group work aspects of the project were important in terms of citizenship and personal, social, and health education. Trisha Lee, Artistic Director of MakeBelieve Arts observed that the pupils developed much stronger group skills, got better at sharing and compromising to achieve a task, and in taking turns. Teacher and Literacy coordinator David Petty also commented on this: 'The children were given plenty of chance to contribute and they were listening to other children's ideas and then they were commenting, making a comment that related to what someone had already said. ...I think often children in key stage 1 are still quite self-centred. They only really think of themselves and what they want and it's very difficult for them to think of other people. So commenting and relating those comments to what people have already said was a very important outcome of the project'.

Trisha Lee said: 'Perhaps the greatest testament to the children's growth was that at the final performance several youngsters were missing and their parts and lines had to be distributed amongst the other children. Children who have had serious behavioural and participative issues throughout the project took on these lines and performed them with professionalism and pride without a single rehearsal'.

The Emergency Exit Arts artists at Monega Primary School encouraged pupils to research by using books, photographs and internet resources, handling props and artefacts, and their sessions used dance, drama, role-play and story-telling to provide a physical and imaginative experience. While many of the teachers felt they were already creative, the project gave them ideas and new skills, helped them develop structure and progression when using these skills and gave them greater confidence in this approach.

In their feedback, a number of Monega Primary School teachers reported the efficacy of the project. Lanka Nammuni (a year 5 teacher) wrote, 'The planning of this topic has taken a much more

cross-curricular direction and facilitated proper team planning within our year group. We have linked topic, literacy and drama lessons as well as topic maths in a meaningful and interesting way'. Working with year 1, Joanne Gardner reported that using the staircases integrated geography, history, and art as well as dance skills into the lesson. Year 4 teacher Anya Singh said: 'We have achieved the geography objectives through art and I think the children will remember what they learnt for longer because of the enjoyment and motivation they have shown'.

Interviewed in July 2007, Gallions Mount Primary School pupils from years 2 and 6 had very good recall of the project work they had done in the previous school term. Year 2 pupils were particularly animated explaining the story that they had worked on, selecting musical instruments to represent its different characters. They described the lessons as different from normal music lessons that they recognised as singing and had liked playing the instruments. The older pupils talked about different learning styles and were of the opinion that this kind of project work suited their active learning style. They talked about learning from others in the groups they were in to compose music, and about negotiating on whose ideas to use for their compositions.

'There were a lot of different learning styles and it gave the children the chance to work cooperatively and creatively. Although it was geography based we actually took it into language with poetry and some of the children wrote river poems and they found it very enjoyable and got a lot from it'.

Teachers of older pupils used the project to deliver the geography curriculum: creating the sounds of a tropical rainforest and those of the journey of a river from source to sea. Images and sounds were used to stimulate musical ideas. Pupils created graphic scores for their compositions using lengths of wallpaper to draw lines and symbols of their own devising to represent the instruments, the duration of play and dynamics. A year 4 teacher commented: 'There were a lot of different learning styles and it gave the children the chance to work cooperatively and creatively. Although it was geography based we actually took it into language with poetry and some of the children wrote river poems and they found it very enjoyable and got a lot from it'.

Creative Partnerships coordinator Julie Asquith's evaluation of the Gallions Mount Primary School project was that 'All of the staff have thoroughly enjoyed and benefited from it in one way or another and ...the children have developed in both confidence and skill. The whole school now has a common understanding of composition, and a legacy of musical activities and strategies for taking the work forward. Our approach to the music curriculum has widened and our understanding of how to develop creative links between music and other curriculum areas increased'.

Summary and Conclusion

Teachers, pupils and students from all four schools were positive about the cross-curricular approach. Learning was reinforced across different subjects and brought together in a way that made sense of the world. Pupils and students had fun and remembered the projects and what they had learned during them.

The projects all succeeded in giving the students and pupils increased confidence and a sense of pride and achievement in creating and presenting their own work. Teachers also developed confidence to experiment in the classroom with new or rediscovered techniques. In feedback forms they talked about being 'more dynamic with my own teaching', 'I am more open to ideas' and 'Although I often use similar teaching styles to the project leaders, I have found myself more motivated to use them more often'.

Many teachers commented on the social aspects of the techniques used by visiting practitioners as typified in this response from a Gallions Mount Primary School teacher. 'I thought their (the children's) engagement in it was brilliant; ...their teamwork and collaborative skills developed ...I would say there are several children in the class that don't cooperate very well and are quite forceful in their own opinions and don't take on other people's point of view and yet their collaborative skills were very good ...They had to communicate and not just orally but had to give each other signs when to come in and so that was very good'.

Several teachers commented on how particular groups benefitted from the different ways of teaching. An Islington Green School teacher commented that: 'For students whose first language is not English it has been good to have kinaesthetic and visual ways of teaching. They don't feel isolated ...they can access it'. Monega Primary School teachers said that: 'The speaking, listening and drama helped special educational needs children and English as an additional language children to really understand the story' and 'I have some children with language and learning difficulties who have developed a lot of confidence and have shown a lot of ability and imagination for story telling that was not so evident previously'. A Gallions Mount Primary School teacher commented that: 'The level of engagement of those children with challenging needs was particularly high'.

These positive outcomes are all the more marked given the challenges that the schools faced in taking a cross-curricular approach. The biggest of these was around timetabling and with two of the schools also running the work across the whole school, the demands were even greater. All the projects took place in one term and teachers felt this exacerbated the time-tabling pressures and the impact on curriculum areas not covered by the project.

In his book 'Out Of Our Minds', Ken Robinson says that 'Creative insights often occur by making connections between ideas or experiences that were previously unconnected' and argues that we need to educate people differently, to encourage the creative capacities that employers now seek in their workforce. 'Creativity prospers best under particular conditions, especially where there is a flow of ideas between people who have different sorts of expertise. It requires an atmosphere where risk-taking and experimentation are encouraged rather than stifled'. The schools delivering the Creative Partnerships projects described in this case-study did encourage that flow of ideas between teachers and artists. They did encourage risk and experiment and, in the main, they were positive about the impact of this on their students.

Katrina Duncan

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

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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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