Exploring the **Impact** of creative learning on artists and practitioners

Creative Partnerships London North

“…society needs to renew and add to its stock of imagining. Just as scientific research is needed to prevent intellectual stagnation, so creative innovation is vital to the process of understanding ourselves, of seeing the world differently as it presents itself anew, of presenting novel propositions about the way we see, hear, look and conceptualise.”

John Tusa ‘On Creativity’

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About Creative Partnerships

Creative Partnerships is the government's flagship creative learning programme, designed to develop the skills of young people across England, raising their aspirations and equipping them for their future. We support thousands of innovative, long-term partnerships between schools and creative professionals, who inspire teachers and young people to challenge how they work and experiment with new ideas in all subject areas.

Creative Partnerships aims to influence policy and practice in both the education and the cultural sectors. It was established by Arts Council England in April 2002, with funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in response to the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) report by Sir Ken Robinson; 'All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education'. It spearheads a raft of initiatives designed to develop creativity and encompasses social, personal and economic domains. As a flagship project, Creative Partnerships can have maximum impact if teachers, parents, children, youth and creative practitioners learn from the experiences that are delivered through the programme.

The creative professionals we work with aren't just from the arts; they come from a broad range of fields. Creativity is not a skill bound within the arts, it is a wider ability that enables individuals to question, make connections, and take an innovative and imaginative approach to problem solving.

Creative Partnerships now operates in 36 areas in England and has worked intensively with around 1,400 schools. It has delivered projects to young people and continuing professional development to teachers in a further 1,800 schools and disseminated best practice to a further 8,000, so that over one third of schools in England have had some contact with the programme.

Research has shown that while the impact of the programme is largely felt in the education sector, over 70% of all Creative Partnerships expenditure is on creative practitioners and cultural organisations. Since the start of the programme we have employed over 5,800 creative practitioners and cultural organisations. By 2008 the amount invested since 2002 will amount to almost £100 million.

In London, there are four Creative Partnerships areas. The London North area was established in 2004 and works within Haringey, Enfield and Waltham Forest. We currently work with almost 80 schools, although long term and bespoke relationships have developed with closer to 20 schools. We have worked with approximately 200 creative practitioners and arts organizations.

The Future of Creativity and of Partnership

In the beginning, for a human to claim to be creative was blasphemy; the only creator was God. It was universally accepted that following in the footsteps of one's fathers was the purpose of life.

But then a few people developed a new idea of creativity, which was originality. Individuals began priding themselves on being different, of knowing better than their ancestors. Artists, who used to concentrate on pleasing the patrons who employed them, started making self-expression their purpose, and aspired to doing what no one else had done before them, which they believed made them geniuses, almost superhuman.

The difficulty with self-expression was that it depended on introspection, on asking the question, "Who am I?"

That often became frustrating, because people were seldom what they wanted to be, or it became boring, because there is a limit to what you can discover about yourself. Besides, you do not see yourself when you look in the mirror; you need to see yourself through other people's eyes before you can begin to know who you are. To do that, you need to put yourself in the place of other people, to become curious about others apart from yourself.

So a new phase in the growth of creativity opens up. Individuals by themselves are not as immediately creative as they might imagine themselves to be. They are often shaped by what others expect of them, by fashion, by imitation. They find it disconcerting to be unique, so they hide behind a mask, fearing to reveal their vulnerability, their limitations and their isolation. Most have tasted only a fragment of the possibilities open to them in their own civilisation, let alone in other civilisations. It is only when they look at their neighbours, and ask what other ways there are of being human, that they recognise the key to a more adventurous kind of creativity requires not so much self-awareness as partnership.

The history of partnership has evolved also. The classical partnership was of father and son, mother and daughter, master and pupil. Then, with the discovery of individuality and loneliness, partnership became a search for someone who resembled one, a friendship of like-minded soul mates. On the public level, nations were formed to foster the conviction that the inhabitants of a particular territory shared the same beliefs, feelings and attitudes, downplaying non-conformity and diversity.

In the search for knowledge, giant leaps in creativity have come not from consensus, but from the interaction of ideas that have not been previously connected, and from the meeting of different disciplines and temperaments gradually discovering that they can collaborate fruitfully. New ideas are born in the same way as virtually all living creatures are, from the mingling of parents who are not identical. But it is only in recent times that partnerships between men and women have aspired to a creativity that embraces knowledge, emotion and spirituality too, profiting from differences in experience, and reaping a reward in the forging of bonds of trust. The result is revolutionary. When two people learn from each other, and see each other as equals, they are changing the world, because they are adding something to it that did not exist before, another particle of mutual understanding. Obtaining stimulation from others is a training in creativity. So the question is no longer, “Who am I?” but “Who are you?”

Partnership in this sense ceases to be a legal contract, where rights and obligations are spelled out in the hope of eliminating everything unpredictable. It is impossible to foretell where creative partnerships will lead. They are an adventure into the unknown, an exploration whose outcome is uncertain. Creativity can have undesirable as well as beneficial results. It has to be exercised with sensitivity; it is indeed an experiment in sensitivity, a process in which one discovers what is going on in the heads and in the lives of others, and how the welfare of all can be advanced through compassion and curiosity.

“Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don’t just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn’t just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards.”

‘Converstion’

Introduction by Jocelyn Cunningham

This publication addresses the impact of working in Creative Partnerships on the creative sector itself. Throughout this book will be interviews and statements of impact on those who have been working with us. There will also be three articles on approaches we have taken in engaging with the creative sector illustrating how artists who partner with schools can stimulate conversation, ideas and create sustainable change.

Our team has been committed to creating a climate where sustainable and creative change can happen for all partners. We look at this as ‘creating a space where anything can happen’, where different sectors can meet people of all ages and roles. We took the view that for sustainable change to happen in partnership working, all parties needed to be brought together in parity and to move away from a servicing culture. This means in practice that schools would not commission projects to service their needs nor arts organizations have schools as recipients of educational programmes. It is led by the participants themselves and means working with people often quite different in their understanding and practice in the world, whether that means young people or those who simply think differently. How do we create environments in which change is possible and led by those undertaking it? Creative Partnerships cannot create a system that will guarantee creativity or even change. Creativity is, by its nature illusive and surprising. But we can investigate the conditions in which it happens.

Much of the work described in this publication is predicated on two ideas: Ken Robinson (author of All Our Futures) identifies creativity as the means by which we understand something, not the definition of an act. Theodore Zeldin, author of our foreword, describes the need for a new kind of conversation as a meeting of minds capable of transformation. The trick is to spread the conversation. We need to consider how the benefits of such conversations feed back into everyday practice and how they might passed on to others, be they students or colleagues.

We initiated three programmes that, in part tackled these issues. Most of our work has been based on questioning and identifying the core question that will lead the work. In addressing partnership we asked: *How can the selection of artists for work in creative learning be one that is driven by shared values and enquiry and not the artform or cv?* This question resulted in our artist scoping programme and the notion of a peer to peer

process of meeting with an exchange of values leading to the documentation of this meeting and addition to Creative Partnerships London North's (CPLN) file of artists. This would in turn lead to pairing partners (schools and artists) based on mutual enquiry.

We also wanted to unpack the idea of how artistic and creative processes themselves can encourage change in a school setting and our catalyst programme was developed. *What value has an artists' understanding of the creative process have for a school undergoing change?* Amanda Dale's case study 'catalysts at work' describes the programme of introducing artist as change agent in a school and not as deliverer of arts activity and explores the catalytic process within a school from an artist's perspective.

And finally, an ambitious project spread across 3 Creative Partnerships', The Labyrinth, provided the opportunity for 16 artists to explore how their work in schools and with each other can extend their own thinking and practice. What is the overlap with one's own practice? *Can working with schools and especially young people inform one's core work?*

Woven through this document is a range of responses on the impact of working in new ways from a diverse body of artists, some as interviews, some as direct responses.

Most importantly, the work in this publication is offered as a contribution to an ongoing and valuable debate about partnerships and creativity, a document of conversations with many voices. The work is based on a community of learners exploring ways of knowing that can impact both on teaching and learning in a school context as well as a creative process, and in both cases is an attempt to articulate the value of this approach. There are rare opportunities to question and challenge the way things are, as well as one's own practice, and to be rewarded often with the immediate response of children and young people. This has been embraced by all our partners with real passion and commitment. We hope this work proves stimulating reading and imagining on how and where these ideas might lead you.

Jocelyn Cunningham
Creative Director CPLN

Jonathan Petherbridge Artistic Director, London Bubble Theatre

I never really got my head round what Creative Partnerships was when it was set up. Then London North scoped us and found we were of interest. The first thing I did was the wellbeing and creativity course; 'Finding freedom within responsibility'. This had a huge impact on me and it meant that we followed through with doing a very big project called 'It can happen here' with London North involving 8 schools, about 5 companies and loads of artists.

The course addressed the impact of creativity on the individual. For myself two aspects were very important: what we were taught and also how we were taught. We were introduced to a lot of very new research and thinking about neurology, how the brain works, how emotions are linked and we learned about emotional intelligence, social intelligence and flow. But what was striking for me was also how we were taught: this was through a wide range of teaching styles but with a focus on the ambience and our wellbeing and enjoyment. Food mattered a lot, as did timing so that everything was done in a very nice way. At the same time we were also bombarded with very hard facts so it was very intense but very comfortable. This approach has been very interesting for me – for my own workshop and directing styles.

The work I do is with a lot of non-professional performers and children and the course helped me think about how people develop on a personal level doing theatre and why it works. I understand a lot more now about social intelligence, about looping – how our brain patterns mirror the others we are engaged with. In a way you know this intuitively if you work in theatre but it has been fascinating how understanding at a deeper level what is actually going on has made me appreciate the process. Children may develop empathy as they grow and audiences need to empathise when they watch but there are not many places where you can learn how to empathise and how empathy is important from both a survival and a learning point of view.

Part of the course meant doing some study and writing it up and this took me deeper into these areas. I started doing more formal observations of what was going on in my own workshops and also invited people in to come and do more independent observations of what was going on, especially around facial expressions and skin tones.

I do a lot of work with 5-7 year olds in a group and I would say my work has definitely become more playful; I spend more time building rapport and working directly on the identification of emotions. I suppose I have slightly adjusted my agenda – which is important and rewarding.

I also took the other 'how' aspect back into our organisation in that I paid more attention to our general creature comforts and wellbeing. For example, we introduced a nice reading area where people can go and relax and reflect – in a way introducing a fight-back against the computer screen! In terms of the organisation, we are generally paying more attention to the wellbeing of the staff as well as – equally important – valuing our work more. In fact emotional wellbeing is now within our mission.

In terms of our dramatic practice, these subjects and considerations have become the subject of our drama: in 'It can happen here', looping and

connecting and empathising became the subjects. We created some very large strange creatures that the children had to befriend and tame so there was a lot of talk about how to make them feel safe and stimulated and how the children felt these things.

But overall I think the main impact of the project was that it fed us, we had fun, we enjoyed it and we felt that all these feelings were legitimised.

Jonathan Petherbridge is Artistic Director of the London Bubble theatre company – an organisation dedicated to making the experience and creativity of theatre accessible to all Londoners.

“In terms of the organisation, we are generally paying more attention to the wellbeing of the staff as well as – equally important – valuing our work more. In fact emotional wellbeing is now within our mission.”

Suzette Rocca Dancer, dance teacher and choreographer

I knew Creative Partnerships (CP) was experimental, investigative, about creativity and about young children. This was different from how I used to work – dance for me was a purely practical form, and I didn't think about it from an intellectual point of view. What I do is highly planned and used to be very choreographed – often working on my own at home. In a way, as a choreographer, you want people to do what you want. I was aware that this approach is not very enriching for children and that there was a need to be more flexible and open-ended, going where the work takes you. I recognised this weakness in my own work with young people and wanted to explore change.

I think the word experimental was a bit frightening for me. My expectations were that it would make changes for me and that I would learn from the experience, maybe not even liking the process – but I was ready for that. The really nice surprise was the high level of value both placed on us, and shown towards this approach. When we went to Italy to work, we stayed in a really nice hotel, not the B&B I would expect. I think this kind of attitude meant I came back with much more confidence knowing there was such a huge interest in arts for the very young and so it helped in taking things forward. It's really hard to get that feeling of confidence deep inside you – but once you have it, it can seep through to the children and goes on and on, making a difference.

I think there was also a definite change in my approach to my own classes for adults. After my first CP project, my class did a showcase at Jackson's Lane, Highgate. Instead of showing them what to do, I asked the class to think during the week ahead about their own way of moving on the ground and then becoming vertical. When their creative input was incorporated into the piece, it was beautiful in a way it wouldn't have been without their individual expression.

I also realised I tend to pack too much into my choreography, making it very intricate. I found I had the confidence to introduce lots more emptiness and simplicity, leaving more space and letting things just happen. Having the confidence to relinquish control definitely resulted from that first trip to Italy – and I know that my involvement with CP has affected lots of areas of my work.

My teaching children has also changed. It used to be a lot more about me being creative: I would show them whole routines and they would be staring at me, as though it was a little performance that they had to try and copy. I do much less now. Before I'd be sweating because I had done so much – now I let them find their own way and sometimes it's me who ends up copying them!

Suzette Rocca is a dancer, dance teacher and has worked for several years teaching young children dance and movement in schools and through the SureStart programme.

“I found I had the confidence to introduce lots more emptiness and simplicity, leaving more space and letting things just happen.”

The artist scoping model:

beyond (bee-**ond**, bi-**yond**)

dialogue (**dahy**-uh-lawg, -log)

Overview

Between 2004 and 2007, Creative Partnerships London North (CPLN) planned and implemented a model of scoping artists to engage with Creative Partnerships projects in London North.

Through three successive phases of artist scoping, CPLN gathered an extensive knowledge bank relating to over 250 creative people and organisations with diverse practices.

This project was intended as a genuine scoping process, to identify artists within London (with an emphasis on the CPLN area) and through conversations between selected scopers and artists/creative practitioners to discover what they were thinking both about their own practice and also about the potential for creative learning in schools. The intention of the encounters was to have an exchange of values and outlooks on ways of approaching teaching for creativity.

The emphasis throughout the project was to understand practitioner interests and concerns in greater depth: it was not intended as a first stage of recruitment.

Intended outcomes of the process

The intended outcomes of the process were:

- To constitute the first step in a process of relationship building between artists, Creative Partnerships (CP), other artists, schools, teachers and young people.
- To enable artists in the area to understand CP practice more.
- To give CPLN a better understanding of the needs of a wide range of creative practitioners.
- To ensure a diversity of practitioners.
- To develop an enquiry–driven approach to partnership working between schools and creative partners.
- To avoid the ‘job interview’ approach and to keep the selection process at an arms length from CPLN staff.

“There is a true art in identifying and meeting the people with whom one must engage, as people, in order to make things happen.”*

The process
More than 250 creative individuals and organizations met with one of seven 'artist scopers' and the process has subsequently informed an extensive creative and cultural sector development programme.

The case in London
With an increasing emphasis on creative industries as a key to London's continuing economic success, it is natural that London has a very high proportion of those employed within these industries: London has 57% of all British creative workforce jobs and the sector also offers London's second biggest source of job growth.

In this context, there is clearly no case for building capacity within the creative sector in London. However those working within education are not necessarily aware of the difference of the CP approach for whole school change nor of the impact of creative learning work in schools upon artistic practice.

The scoping period
The scoping was structured in three phases (2004-05, 2005-06, 2007), with the second and third rounds building on the previous round and being modified to ensure that the greatest possible diversity of artists and insights were incorporated.

Selection of scopers
The artist scopers were selected by the Creative Director and the Programmer: they represented a diversity of age, gender, background, experience and interests as well as core art form. Scopers had regular meetings to discuss progress and arising issues.

Identification of artists
The artists/creative practitioners were identified through existing networks of scopers, the networks of the CPLN core team, statements of interest submitted to CPLN, recommendations from other CP areas and finally through the networks of those artists scoped.

Phases 1 and 2 were about individuals. In phase 3, organisations were identified targeting leads such as artistic directors in order to gain an overview of the whole organisation.

> **"The consequences of making choices, how you see yourself as opposed to how others see you, defining yourself rather than being defined by others tends to be a constant thread."***

> **"I'm interested in fusing different cultures while maintaining my own identity; creating dual language…poetry."***

Criteria for inclusion
Criteria for inclusion in the scoping process included:

- A geographical focus on the three boroughs – Enfield, Haringey and Waltham Forest – served by CPLN but including artists living elsewhere.
- Representation of artists working in the full range of artistic disciplines, including both emerging and established artists.
- Cross section representing all aspects of diversity including gender, age, culture, race and those with disabilities.

Approaching the conversation
There are several key points to make about how the encounter was planned and approached. The first is to emphasise that this meeting was open-ended; its value lay in the nature of the conversation and not on any potential outcomes such as employment with CPLN. The conversation was to be at arms length from CPLN – it was to be about two creative practitioners meeting to exchange views that would be incorporated into a directory of artist attitudes and reflection. It was to be a peer to peer exchange, independent of either a form of interview or a CPLN meeting. Scopers were encouraged to communicate that the conversation was 'getting to know you' leading to an exchange of information and values rather than an offer of work. To this end, scopers were asked to select a café of their choice for the meeting and to enjoy the conversation over tea and cake so that it felt informal, relaxed and open.

The overriding emphasis throughout the process was to encourage individuals to try something they had never done before – to meet a scoper on an informal basis to talk about ideas about creative learning and working with schools and artistic practice.

Structuring the conversation
Although there was no set format to the conversation, scopers were given a list of items to cover, intended primarily as a guide.

These included an outline of key messages about the work of CP, particularly around the formulation of the concept of mutual enquiry between schools and artists. This was to ensure a consistency of message throughout the conversation.

Documenting the conversation

Each meeting was to be documented in a format to be agreed with CPLN, which in practice reflected the different approaches or styles of the scopers; for example one transcribing the meeting word for word, another recounting in a narrative with lots of personal insights.

Following the conversation

Artists who had been scoped and were still interested in working with CP were asked to submit CVs and statements of interest to the office, which along with the documentation from the meeting, formed a collection of material on the artist.

A colour coding system assisted with partnering through enquiry and not art form. As part of the programming analysis, artists were categorised by colour to determine links and similarities; this also assisted with partnering developing artists with more established artists for peer learning and support. This system was then utilised by the CPLN team, creative agents and producers working with schools to enable partnerships based on mutual interest and enquiry.

What was discovered during the artist scoping process

Scoper responses and documentation

Scopers gave the following responses to their experience of the process:

- Acknowledging that their position as a fellow creative allowed for more honesty and openness during the meetings with artists with regard to both positive and negative previous experiences and perceptions of CP.
- Viewing their role as being a 'filter' between CP and potential partners.
- Understanding that through dialogue, they uncovered the artists' 'questions' and needs.
- Identifying which artists are committed to working with children and young people as well as their attitudes towards and experiences of educational settings.
- Demystifying the work of CP and asking what they would like to learn and from whom.

- Realising that the lateral thinking possible in a conversation allowed for the wider interests of the artists to be considered when envisaging potential partnerships.
- Recognising the strengths and weaknesses of what was acknowledged to be a subjective evaluation.
- Valuing the mutual learning that takes place.

Artist responses

Responses from artists relate to both the conversation and the project work that resulted from the process:

- Many scopers and artists expressed an enjoyment and a sense of privilege in meeting with another creative practitioner to discuss experiences and values.
- Artists having an open dialogue with artists are more likely to be candid with one another and to be able to relate to one another's experiences and engage in fruitful discussion around education practice and creativity.
- Some artists felt that the conversation put CP work into a wider political and governmental context and part of an ongoing debate about the nature of creativity and the potential for this work in schools.
- Most artists interviewed felt that the meeting did address their own needs and desires regarding the development of their work in any potential partnership, and that their ideas were listened to and engaged with.

"I am fascinated by the idea of art and science"*

Overview of regular CP process

Most CP offices appoint intermediaries to manage projects and this role encompasses the recruitment of practitioners as well as subsequently managing and brokering the relationships between practitioners, schools and CP offices.

These intermediaries are called a variety of terms: creative development workers, creative agents or creative advisors. The Burns Owens report (Investing in the creative and cultural economies – the impact of Creative Partnerships) refers to them as agents. When a CP office has not used an agent, a core practitioner has typically adopted the role of identifying and recruiting practitioners. In this respect, CP offices and their agents can be regarded as 'gatekeepers' in that they control access for creative practitioners to opportunities.

What was unique about the artist scoping model?

CPLN instigated an open-ended research project with an approach to the process of identifying and recruiting artists and creative partners. This process fed into subsequent recruitment but in a very natural organic way as the team could identify interests that had been expressed during documented conversations. They could then match these interests with schools concerns.

What are the benefits of the CPLN artist scoping model

The CPLN team spend less time on the process of setting up partnerships between creative partners and schools as they feel that the artist scoping procedure has built a thorough picture of the artists and their practices as initial data. All managing the process have been able to 'get to know' over 250 creative practitioners without going through the time consuming process of interviews.

Key to the process was that CPLN were able to use statements of interest and match them with school concerns to create partnerships where there was already a potential common interest for a mutual enquiry.

"I love taking risk in my work at whatever level."*

"What is learning? How do we find our own voice? How do I live in my own skin?"*

Matching school and artist areas of interest

Examples where CPLN have used the scoping information to find similarities in regard to artists and schools questions – focusing on areas of interest rather than specific artistic discipline include the following matches:

A school was interested in making their dining space more of a learning environment	Matched with ⟷	An artist interested in using food to discuss and highlight issues and concerns
A school wished to find ways for their local community to see it in a better light	Matched with ⟷	An artist with substantial background in advertising and an interest in exploring ideas of community voice
A school wanted to look at the impact of space on behaviour	Matched with ⟷	An artist working within the perception of environments and creating spacial experiences. The artist was also interested to learn how children can inform the environment created by an artist
A school interested in pupil transition	Matched with ⟷	An opera company going through its own transitional process due to a merger – exploring similarities and how to illustrate/represent those ideas within a school

Artist development and CP programme strategy

The scoping process, including the documentation in combination with the artist statement of interest, provided vital information for increasing the development for the artists and acted as useful information for CPLN's programming strategy.

Examples of this include:

- Colour coding idea assisted with partnering developing artists with more established artists for peer learning and support.
- Scoping provided a "short cut" when CPLN were in a position to broker artists within the school projects and offer work; i.e. communication between CPLN and the artists was based on their enquiries, their ethos and their ideas, rather than their experience or practice – providing a true "casting" picture and pitching the communication on a level of creative thought rather than creating a job interview scenario.

"My interest is in problem solving – feeling that it is the root of all creative activity."*

- Scoping enabled an understanding on what motivated the artists to become involved with creative learning employment. This also enabled CPLN to bring in artists that didn't have previous experience of working in schools but were interested and committed to working with young people.
- Scoping helped enormously in terms of identifying the artist's skills and methods with regard to relationship building with schools. The approach of the artist could also be matched with the "personality" of the school or could be taken into account when casting for the school's needs i.e. measured, thoughtful, delicate approach would be appropriate in some environments whereas an energetic, fun, zealous attitude may be better for others.

"I'm interested in how you engage with people in the process, in the journey that people take."*

Finally, there was a desire to examine what is meant by "partnership". The scoping helped to communicate both to the artist and to the school the understanding that the goal is a deeper and therefore more fruitful relationship than that based on projects or employment.

Conclusions

The artist scoping model was realized through a research project conducted over three years.

- As a result of the process CPLN has built up a rich resource of information on a wide range of potential creative practitioners within the creative sector. This resource is very different from existing artist directories and databases.
- Artists are better informed about the approach and vision of CP, as well as local practice.
- Most of the participants enjoyed and valued the process of meeting a fellow practitioner to talk about their ideas, experience, needs and aspirations.
- Artist scoping is one part of the mapping out of agendas for any potential partnership and it works to ensure that the artists needs are taken into account in the first instance.
- Scoping has enabled mutually beneficial pairings between artists and schools based on complementary areas of interest.

- The majority of the artists who have worked with CPLN came out of the scoping process, but they came out of a value sharing exercise, not an employment process.
- As a model, scoping offers valuable insights into the recruitment and partnership building process as well as building a rich resource.

"What interests me is when someone opens up; not using a certain technique, but a simple recipe or life story."*

**scoped artists comments*

Robert Jarvis Sound artist

It felt like I understood the Creative Partnerships (CP) agenda very early on. In fact, I could say that I had been waiting for CP to come along because I'd already been investigating issues related to the creative process. I was eager to use the CP opportunity to do something different – if you like, to try and take what I had been doing up to some new level. In return, CP took my ideas seriously and supported me in my quest.

With London North I was able to develop my learning further with a project, which came to be known as 'Reflective Conversations'. Fundamentally, this was a continuing professional development project in which I passed on the particular insight I had gained over the years relating to creative practice, learning processes and also their relevance in today's society. I found the task of deconstructing what I knew – so that it could be passed on in order to aid others development – to be a challenging task and as a result I learnt a lot through this. I now feel in a strong position as an artist as I think I have a good understanding of my artistic process; what I do, and why.

I find it difficult to describe the effect that CP has had on my main body of work as an artist. Certainly, I think that I am a different person than before CP began; yet, it's hard to know whether it has turned me into something that I wouldn't have eventually become anyway. I do think that I am aware of an improved understanding of my process, and I would go so far as to say that this could well be influencing the ideas that I am currently investigating. At the very least, I could say that the various projects that I have been involved with have sped up my development, and for that I am grateful.

The night before the first test run of my 'Europhonix' piece in Kent (a composition with students which lasts the length of time it takes to travel through the Channel Tunnel) Peter Jenkinson, the then CP director asked me something like: "What is it that you do which is so good"? My reply was that, "I didn't really know – I just did what I did". I then followed this with, "I guess that answer isn't good enough anymore". I think I've been trying to answer that question ever since, and my Reflective Conversations sessions have allowed me to explore, analyse, and express some of these growing understandings to others also interested in unpacking best practice.

Robert Jarvis works as a sound artist and is involved in a wide range of creative activities. His projects have at their centre not only the creation and performance of new work but also the process of creating that work.

> **"I am aware of an improved understanding of my process, and… this could well be influencing the ideas I'm currently investigating"**

Barry Lewis Photographer

It is a long time since I taught chemistry and though I have photographed a variety of schools for magazine stories, as well as teaching photography in art colleges, I had not been into schools in the role of practising artist. For CP, I worked with sound artists on a project called 'Where do ideas come from?'

I worked with mixed groups of children and school staff and I took as a starting point how we really look and see what is around us in our immediate environment. Everyone in the group used simple digital cameras to look at their surroundings: we then reviewed the resulting thousand images together and edited them down to a final selection of 30 to which we then produced an improvised soundtrack.

CP has impacted my own practice in that a lot of my personal work was recording the extraordinary in the ordinary. I'd already started this process: working with the kids and staff helped me see things I hadn't seen before. The kids didn't have an agenda, they didn't want to get things right or take a 'good' photo; everything was different to them. They were looking at the world with far more open eyes than I could ever manage. This was interesting because it wasn't about teaching photography as such, about using the camera as a tool to achieve certain results; it was about sharing the seeing experience.

A memorable moment was having photographed with the group in some allotments near the school and creating a really magical sound track together where we all ended up whispering to some stunning images of decaying leaves.

Most of my working life I have either worked on my own, or with a journalist, creating a magazine story. This was the first time I had worked with a sound artist and was really awakened to the relationship between images and sound. This has led to me working much more with image and sound – both in live performance and also in a collaboration with Robert Jarvis that was online. I have enjoyed the process of creating together very much and every sound artist I've worked with has led to a further collaboration and new, richer directions. It has also put me in touch with the possibility of developing my own personal projects with those people.

Barry Lewis was a chemistry teacher before studying photography at the Royal College. For twenty five years he has covered stories for international magazines. In recent years his work has included corporate, advertising and social issues as well as developing personal projects.

> **"I was really awakened to the relationship between images and sound. Every sound artist I've worked with has led to a further collaboration and new, richer directions."**

“When the forms of an old culture are dying, the new culture is created by a few people who are not afraid to be insecure.”

Rudolph Bahro

Angeline Conaghan

Robert Jarvis

Jonathan Petherbridge

Creature from It Can Happen Here created by PifPaf.

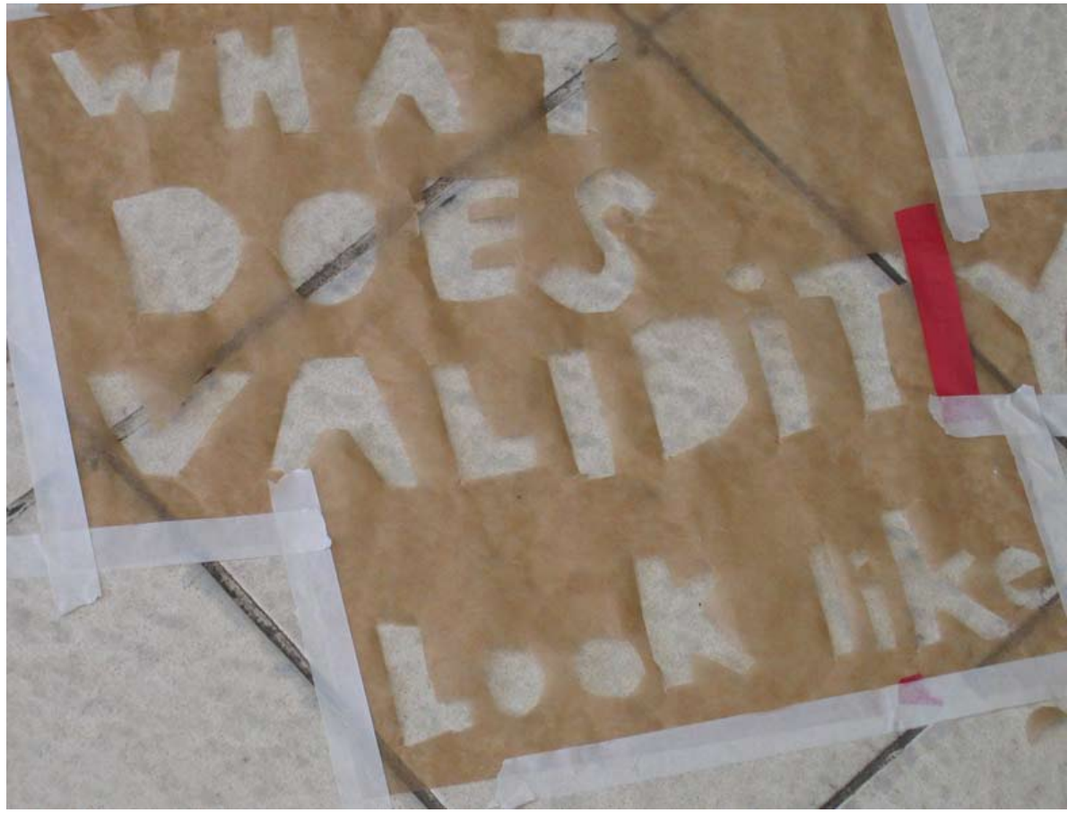
Barry Lewis

Suzette Rocca

Jocelyn Cunningham
& Natasha Silsby (CPLN)

Gráinne Byrne


enjoy
the
detail


WHAT
DOES
VALIDITY
Look like

Passionate about the process:

catalysts at work

Mapping out the terrain

In 2004 Creative Partnerships London North (CPLN) began a research inquiry into the unique role that artists can play in helping effect sustainable change in schools. The programme lasted two and a half years.

The aim was to understand more about how an artist and the artistic process – as opposed to any other external agent or intervention – could make a difference in schools that were experiencing a markedly high degree of complexity in their ongoing change process.

CPLN believed the important questions to address were:

- What are the phenomena and characteristics that make positive, sustainable change possible in a school setting?
- What tends to impede the change process, or stop a 'potential change' from becoming embedded in the culture of some schools, for example those dealing with particularly complex scenarios?
- Given that artists are particularly experienced in creativity – and the application of that creativity – what are the specific aspects of an artist's creative process that, if applied by schools, could help them foster the changes they want to make happen?

To respond fully to this final question means separating out the process of creativity (the way of thinking, seeing, noticing, making connections, approaching the unexpected, trying out new things, problem-solving, living with ambiguity and so on) from the doing (the end-product or activity, such as making a finished painting or piece of music).

By understanding more about the way in which an artist operates, much can be learned about how to stimulate positive change in scenarios that are particularly complex or even apparently 'unchangeable'.

The research context

CPLN's thinking was influenced by a substantial piece of research that had been commissioned by the Creative Partnerships national office: 'Creative Friends Model Within Creative Partnerships Black Country' (Anna Craft, The Open University, 2004).

The research findings in the Open University report helped to crystallise CPLN's thinking for a radically different kind of role for artists in schools, that would offer greater scope for:

- Time to develop a deeper and more potent series of relationships across a whole school.
- Latitude to work from where the school is actually 'at', rather than applying a pre-determined process 'regardless' of the school's specific dynamics.
- Creating a climate that was conducive to further collaboration with Creative Partnerships (CP).

An extension of the artist's role

CPLN identified that there was a need for the artist to move beyond their traditional service delivery of an arts education project and to act as a catalyst for change by bringing in an outsider's presence and artistic perspective.

By virtue of being an artist the catalyst would be able to draw on their practical experience of 'creativity', to spark changes within the school environment rather than delivering a pre-determined arts-based project from outside.

This represented a subtle change in thinking. The new approach would be less about delivering discrete projects that would begin and end, and be more about modelling a way of being, that was different enough to provoke fresh thinking.

The other distinctive feature of this concept was that the interaction between artist and school would be based on a peer relationship, rather than a service relationship. In order to work effectively with the complex challenges within some schools, it was necessary to break away from a traditional approach of 'problem + external intervention = solution' and move towards a relationship in which the artist could work side-by-side with teaching and non-teaching staff, children, parents and other stakeholders.

Building on experience

CPLN deals with a variety of schools with a wide range of issues. Experience showed that, in some schools, the collaboration between the school and a CP artist was visibly bearing fruit. Yet in other locations and contexts, introducing arts education or 'creative activities' seemed to produce just that – activity, but with little discernable change.

"The new approach would be less about delivering discrete projects that would begin and end, and be more about modelling a way of being, that was different enough to provoke fresh thinking."

In other words, outcomes from CP interventions were entirely context-dependent. Some schools have conditions that lend themselves to innovation; some have conditions that inherently resist change and development. When designing the new 'catalyst' role it was essential to have a full understanding of all the factors affecting the school – its 'back history' in other words. Factors include the following:

a) Some schools find themselves facing a degree of challenge and complexity that is 'out of the ordinary'. This can include restructuring, designation within Special Measures, new policy frameworks, or internal divisions created by bullying and hostility between sub-cultures.

b) In this kind of scenario, further challenges emerge: high staff turnover can add to the level of anxiety in the school, for example. On a more subtle level, people were managing their stress by 'closing down' and putting up barriers to change. In such an environment, it was not uncommon for the climate to feel temporarily 'unsafe' and defensive against any perceived 'threat' no matter how benign.

   The outlook in such an environment becomes one of survival rather than growth, leading potentially to a negative cycle that makes it very difficult to welcome change.

c) One of the barriers to breaking this cycle in any organisational setting is a collective belief that the source of positive change is 'out there somewhere', that it does not reside with the individuals within the organisation but somewhere else. In other words change cannot be instigated from within. This mindset, when deeply entrenched, can give rise to feelings of powerlessness.

d) The result of this mindset was that for the CP team, there was too much reliance on a CP service in which the school perceived the CP practitioner as someone who would 'come in and do something for them' and not that they themselves needed to take an active part in the change process.

   It must be stressed that this service approach works extremely well in many scenarios. However, it can become unhelpful when it coincides with a phase of the school's life in which collective spirits are at low ebb.

   In such a scenario, operating from a service model (effectively a customer-supplier relationship) can actually do the school a disservice because it further reinforces their sense of not being

in charge of their destiny, and of the solution being 'out there' rather than 'in here'.

e) Introducing arts education activities into this context can become self-defeating: people focus on the new activity in the hope that it will 'make things better'. When change does not happen, this contributes to a growing belief that 'things cannot change'.

In analysing these issues it became clear to CPLN that a key aspect of this new catalyst role would be to help the school move from first-level learning (doing things more creatively in the system), to second-level learning (making the system itself more open to creativity).

It was clear that only schools whose senior management demonstrated openness to this second-level learning – and to a 'peer relationship' with an artist – would reap the long-term benefits.

The role of the catalyst

It was decided that the newly conceived role should be called a 'Catalyst', with its connotations of:

- bringing energy and impetus
- creating alternative pathways
- stimulating reaction and action
- participating in that reaction but remaining distinct from it
- providing the conditions in which change happens.

"By not going in with solutions and pre-conceived methodologies, the Catalyst would be able to gather a more comprehensive picture of the school's everyday life and the factors contributing to their situation."

The primary task of the Catalyst would be to create the conditions in which people could engage with what inspired, motivated and made sense to them about creating positive change together.

Reflecting on how this task was developed in practice would form an important part of the overall inquiry, as well as understanding of what those conditions for change are.

It was equally important to CPLN that Catalysts were given full support during their work in the schools: to that end an equal amount of time was spent in continuing professional development sessions as was spent in schools. The Catalysts all noted that this degree of support was invaluable.

The Catalyst would be modelling a way of working based on an experiential approach (learning-by-doing), as opposed to a pre-designed delivery framework. Therefore, the support provided to them by the CPLN team would need to be geared towards coaching and facilitation of skills and

confidence, rather than 'training and telling'.

By not going in with solutions and pre-conceived methodologies, the Catalyst would be able to gather a more comprehensive picture of the school's everyday life and the factors contributing to their situation. Meanwhile the school would be able to share in this 'external perspective' and think afresh about what would really engage them, free of pre-conceptions and not limited to an existing frame of reference.

"The cumulative effect of the many 'little conversations' over time strengthens the capacity of the school to work together as a unified body."

After a period of being 'embedded' in the school, the Catalyst would be able to offer CP an invaluable insight into the world of the school, to help CP better understand how to meet its needs and collaborate effectively with all concerned.

From thought to action

The outcome of the initial development phases was a group of six Catalysts, each one working intensively with a school – in total four secondary, one primary and one special needs school.

Each school-Catalyst relationship began and evolved differently, at a different pace and meeting challenges and possibilities along the way. Despite the varied experiences, there was considerable learning about the common characteristics and behaviours that Catalysts demonstrated in order to make a positive impact. The following is a summary of these characteristics.

Helping people make connections and keep ownership of their situation.

The Catalyst moves freely around the school, not belonging to any one aspect of school life. When staff may be feeling disconnected from one another, the Catalyst can instigate conversations which help soften boundaries and re-engage people in taking responsibility for what is happening. Catalysts offer different forms of basic human interaction across the whole school – mingling, observing, debating and questioning, or helping people 'think out loud' about their concerns. The cumulative effect of the many 'little conversations' over time strengthens the capacity of the school to work together as a unified body.

Breaking across the linear to elicit passions and motivations.

It is a natural human tendency to stick with what is already known and what one believes is possible. If creating a positive change of any kind requires three elements (thinking, feeling and willing), then Catalysts focus on the thinking/feeling elements in their work with schools, to help them find the third – the conscious, committed will to make something different/better/enlivening happen. Sometimes the most effective way of triggering that engagement is to go against the grain of convention, to act

as a 'benign irritant'. Other times, the Catalyst's role is to support people in expressing what truly matters to them, and what they want to achieve with the help of CP in general. Catalysts help people to name changes they want to see, and challenge them to think about how they could contribute to those changes.

Consciously keeping their attention on the 'how' rather than the what.
How the school engages with any activity, creative or mundane, will reveal important 'data' about its way of thinking and seeing the world. The Catalyst's role is to help others to use any activity, routine or otherwise, as a vehicle for learning about themselves, how they make choices, and what is really happening. They may contrive or provoke contact and interaction, by making interventions as apparently simple as putting everyday items in out-of-the-ordinary locations, or inviting participation in an out-of-the-ordinary activity. It is important that Catalysts do not get lost in activity as an end in itself. These 'mini missions' as one Catalyst described them, provided invaluable opportunities to stimulate a degree of creative de-stabilisation so that staff could interact with each other in totally new ways.

"Catalysts help people to name changes they want to see, and challenge them to think about how they could contribute to those changes."

Help others to stay with the challenge of becoming aware.
Sometimes, in order to make a change possible, people need to cross an important threshold. This might involve having difficult conversations, giving feedback, trying something risky, naming something that is taboo, listening rather than speaking, or tolerating for longer than normal a degree of confusion, ambiguity or discomfort at not knowing the answer. A Catalyst can provide a useful presence to encourage people in the school environment to 'stick with it' for long enough to let the change happen or move beyond an impasse. In these situations, a balance of challenge and support is vital. Without empathy, people do not feel safe, yet it is when they go 'beyond the comfort zone' that the conditions for change can be created. Catalysts, therefore, had to be mindful not to stay too long in the empathic support role, as this risked a degree of 'cosiness' that would diminish their capacity to 'agitate' helpfully.

Notice and reflect back the little things that reveal a bigger thing.
Catalysts use acuity skills and process observation to offer the school a new perspective, a different understanding, a potential 'aha moment' as to how things really are and how they could be. They look out for patterns, tendencies, anomalies and potential. They may overtly challenge, by asking a 'risky' question about what they see, or simply mirror back to the other(s) what they observe, as a way of opening up a new insight or conversation.

Model resilience, resourcefulness and self-esteem.
When faced with a perplexing or difficult situation, resilience, resourcefulness and self-esteem are vital to navigating any change process. Catalysts are continually faced with challenges of their own, to 'have a go at things' that are beyond their familiar territory, and as such can bring a powerful permission to the school to try new approaches. This is far removed from the concept of 'failing', and more about discovering, where learning and change are experienced as a journey, not as a pass or fail 'event'. Modelling behaviour can provide the school with invaluable experience of how to continue working towards change whilst keeping relationships intact.

Hold time.
In a school environment that is so firmly rooted in the framework of the timetabled day, Catalysts found that one of their biggest contributions was simply creating a space (making time) for staff to reflect and assimilate their learning.

One Head whose school had worked with a Catalyst for several months described how they had experienced the relationship:

"The Catalyst has somehow managed to get everyone talking; children, parents, governors, the caretaker, dinner supervisors, not just teaching staff. It's a bit like a 360-degree objective appraisal without the 'judgement' of Ofsted, more based on empathy, emotional intelligence if you like."

The role of creative activity in the change process
Given that the Catalyst's role was not focused on using their art form to deliver arts education, a recurring question during the initial pilot phase from the school members was 'so what does a Catalyst actually do then?'

Some individuals found it difficult to lose the expectation that the Catalyst would at some point deliver an arts-based project. However, the expectation that the Catalyst would 'come in and do something for us' was also fuelled by the fact that Catalysts did indeed sometimes instigate activities around the school – and sometimes very visibly so.

This apparent contradiction understandably proved perplexing for some people, some of the time. It is based on a subtle but fundamental distinction between activity as an end in itself, and activity as a creative device for a wider purpose.

As described earlier, in order to bring about a new way of thinking, the Catalyst needs to keep their attention on helping the school become aware of its process (how it does things) as distinct from its content (what it does).

Much of this process-awareness is about helping people notice how they relate to each other, make connections across the school, behave towards one another and make sense of what is happening.

Becoming conscious of these everyday interactions and dynamics (one might call them the 'cultural norms') is the first step towards helping people to understand how they contribute to creating the status quo they live and work in. Once people see the reality they are creating together, they can take responsibility for it and start asking themselves how they would like it to be in future.

In order to facilitate this awareness, designing a shared activity can be an invaluable device to help participants engage with each other in new and more creative ways that cross boundaries of status, age, role and habit.

While these activities (or 'mini missions' as referred-to earlier) can appear at first glance to be peripheral or even disconnected from the change process, in fact they are being consciously held by the Catalyst as a means to interrupt the status quo and create out-of-the-ordinary conditions.

Some of the activities are pre-planned and others are improvised or are a response to what the Catalyst sees happening in front of them. Over time, it is the cumulative effect of such activities and the conversations triggered by them that start to help the school create more fertile ground for positive change.

This is one of the distinctive characteristics of the artistic process itself; the ability and willingness to break from linear logic or routines and discover 'what happens if…'

The following examples illustrate just a few of a wide range of activities that Catalysts have instigated as a creative device:

- Inviting teachers and non-teaching staff to make/do something together – baking a cake, flying kites.
- Engaging the whole school (during assembly) in learning a song together.

"For some it is still seen as some arty activity, and for others it is excavating some deep issues about how we learn and work together. It has been very revealing and at time not easy but I am very clear that it weaves through our whole development as a school."

- Inhabiting the staff room, simply inviting conversation, setting up a 'tea ceremony' or installing a special suggestions and questions box (nothing off-limits) for staff.
- Shadowing non-teaching staff to observe 'a day in the life of', witnessing how discipline was handled and the behaviour of children outside of class, and hearing attitudes first-hand.
- Preparing a classroom differently – scattered items all over the floor to create a sculpture.
- Pitching and occupying a tent in the middle of a maths classroom.
- Drawing a temporary line down the middle of a corridor.
- Inviting staff to participate in a session about 'the school as an island', where each person designated themselves a role and a location on this metaphorical landscape.
- In a classroom, inviting children to wrap all the chairs in newspaper and, later, tear it all off.
- In collaboration with a maths teacher, hiding behind the white board and, unannounced, blowing bubbles from behind until the children noticed. Coming out of hiding and, unannounced, leaving the room.

The school-Catalyst relationship is about creating a legacy of sustained change, and as such is a long-term endeavour characterised by subtle but important shifts, for example:

- Relationships get stronger and trust starts to grow.
- A belief that 'change is possible' starts to flourish here and there.
- People feel more able to say the unsayable and think the unthinkable.
- Underlying dynamics come to light that had previously impeded progress.
- The real issues of concern start to become uncovered and worked with – status issues, the anxieties of children, blocks in communication.
- People learn about what matters to others and where the shared aspirations lie.

- Conversations trigger fresh ideas, or revive enthusiasm for initiatives that had become swamped under the weight of daily pressures.
- People become more willing to try new approaches.
- A collective will and impetus for change gradually begins to develop.

Another Head described how they perceive the nature and impact of the role:

"Several months down the line there is still diversity of understanding and opinions about the role and I think that's to be expected as it is quite subtle. For some it is still seen as some arty activity, and for others it is excavating some deep issues about how we learn and work together. It has been very revealing and at times not easy but I am very clear that it weaves through our whole development as a school."

So what are the conditions for change?
The experience of the Catalysts revealed some important insights into what influences whole-school change, and how knowledge of the creative process itself can contribute positively to that change.

The key factors that the six Catalysts collectively identified as necessary for widespread change in a school included the following attitudes and qualities.

- a willingness to be self-aware
- relationship and connection
- learning through discovery, to create new choices
- tolerating ambiguity and discomfort
- effective reflection and self-challenge
- keeping focused and aiming for the horizon
- strong intent

It seems that it is this strong intent, in regard to the work of the Catalysts, which has revealed itself to be the pivotal factor in creating a climate conducive to whole school change.

Self-determination cannot, by definition, be provided by an outside agent. However, Catalysts discovered that even in the most apparently 'immovable' scenarios, with the right support and challenge, people could become interested again in new possibilities and the scope for change.

One Catalyst summed up their experience of this:

"If people never get a chance to talk to each other about what matters to them, they start to feel disconnected from each other and the school. They don't see themselves as part of the school, they feel alone and separate. Kids can also feel that same isolation, and lack of ownership of the school and of their own learning. But our presence as a Catalyst means people get the opportunity, to make human contact, to create a link and a feeling of ownership. And when they feel ownership, they can pass this onto the children, this self-belief and thirst for learning."

"As an artist you have to fail, to find the good, to see things clearly again."

The other key learning from the work of the Catalysts was that the traits outlined above reflect closely some of the most important features of the creative process itself. In other words, in taking this new CP approach, schools were not only planting seeds for sustainable change, they were also learning about creativity itself in a very direct way.

Final thoughts
For the Catalysts themselves, the experience so far has proved to be one of the most challenging, developmental and rewarding of their careers. In particular they highlight the challenge and reward of the peer relationship:

"It's lovely to go in and practice your art form because you feel confident at that, you are the expert. But working alongside people is different. We are all having to deal with the human trait of being self-critical. Will I get it right, look stupid, am I good enough, am I failing? These doubts impede us all from being creative, so I have constantly battled through them. As an artist you have to fail, to find the good, to see things clearly again."

It is perhaps this last point – of failing and returning to re-try – that gives the strongest indication of what exactly it is about the intervention and presence of an artist, as opposed to a different kind of external input, that makes a difference.

Another Catalyst described their experience as follows:

"Artists take the risk of going where their inspiration takes them and being willing to change course depending on what they find. We are practiced at getting intensely involved in the making of something, putting our all into it – then moving on. We don't get attached to things we have made because creativity isn't about the end-point. So we work passionately to create something, but then we are willing to let it go, because we are just as passionate about the process as in the end-product.''

Being a Catalyst meant taking on a kind of internal 'stance' in the school, being steadfast and rigorous in modelling how to cultivate openness to change, and encouraging others to develop this stance also.

Just as one cannot learn to swim by looking at diagrams in a book, one cannot learn to be creative by watching someone else 'do it'. Hence, the Catalyst experience provided schools with a unique opportunity to learn from a practicing artist how a creative process can be modelled and applied at every level – from leadership, management and curriculum delivery, to the child's learning experience.

Amanda Dale
www.life-energy.co.uk

"Just as one cannot learn to swim by looking at diagrams in a book, one cannot learn to be creative by watching someone else 'do it'."

Angeline Conaghan Singer, songwriter and musician

I was asked to be part of a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) with 5 other musicians and these conversations led to my taking part in a Creative Partnerships (CP) project. I was put off at first by the language used to describe what we were doing. I'm a musician, I don't have an academic background and there was a whole level of 'artspeak' that I found it hard to relate to – a terminology that I had to learn.

The flipside was that it was an amazing opportunity to sit in a room with six musicians and to think and talk – and be paid for it. I've never had this kind of treatment as an artist.

The first important thing is that the CP work increased my income: this meant I could finance my own project. Because I didn't have to teach on a fixed schedule I got an increase in flexibility and could move my own projects on.

The second is the importance of the relationship with other artists and this has also fed into my personal projects. But the really big thing for me was being involved in the Catalyst programme: part of this activity was a CPD strand and so we met regularly over a year. The bonds between us are strong enough for us to still keep meeting now that the programme has finished and the opportunity for these shared conversations has led to collaborations for me across disciplines in ways that might not have happened.

The Catalyst programme was really challenging for me: but it has meant some major changes for me on a personal and professional level. The process of questioning what others are doing led very directly to questioning myself and wondering about changing my own practice. The CP experience forces you to analyse your own practice, to look at what sort of person you are and how you operate socially.

Being a Catalyst was very tough and stressful and at times I wondered why I was not putting that level of effort and energy into my projects. But it has been very beneficial because it has made me more assertive, as a person and as a singer. I'm certainly less intimidated by 'artspeak' and can write a funding application now!

Angeline Conaghan taught music in New Zealand and then in London. She has a long term collaboration creating and performing electronic pop music with the group Bark in Norway. She also performs with Pioneers.

"The process of questioning what others are doing leads very directly to questioning myself and wondering about changing my own practice."

Gráinne Byrne Artistic Director, Scarlet Theatre

The perception of my process is constantly changing: it's hard to stop at any one moment and define it precisely. With my Scarlet work I'm completely clear and could explain it at any time. But my work with Creative Partnerships (CP) needs a different 'job description'; I'm not creating a show so it is something else.

My starting point is always to ask – what interests me? What questions do I have? If it's a piece of text or a piece of theatre, there will be a style of actor or an emphasis that I identify and this will be the one quality or focus that I work to. Everything else around it will then fall into place because I have got that one element exactly the way I want it. That's not a definitive way of working but it's my way. Making it all come together and work collaboratively to get there is what it is all about.

The CP situation is different: it is laden with agendas – that of the school, of the teachers, of the curriculum. I am learning to work with the whole context and make my way through a jungle of expectations including those of the kids and the artists. I have to understand what is required and what speaks to me about the situation. And then I have to approach it in the same way I would a production. I've also understood that through these constraints can come increased creativity. Once you identify and start feeling comfortable with those constraints, you can move forward.

I was really excited by the challenge posed by CP and I feel as if I have learned new ways of being a director. My current CP project – The Labyrinth (a project shared with three CP areas involving 16 artists. See page 50) – is different from directing a piece of theatre: I am collaborating with artists with expertise and from different disciplines, for example a sound artist. I am enjoying finding out about a different style of directing which is more about coming together with artists in different disciplines and imagining together as well as consulting with them and integrating them and their ideas into the whole process.

That has been another development for me; finding a way of talking to people outside my own world of theatre – talking to teachers and artists from different spheres. But then the nature of this particular enquiry is different too: we are focusing on sensory work, how to give and how to receive an experience and how to create a framework for that. It's like mercury – it's hard to pin down! I've found it all extremely stimulating and loved being part of it all.

On a personal level I knew I was delighted when I came up with a structure for The Labyrinth – which is based on exchange of experiences. Once I had the structure in my head I could move forward to the next stage of shared exploring with all the people involved.

The CP work has definitely caused me to think about how I approach other projects and maybe more importantly, it has brought about a new way in which I approach leadership. When you're leading, you can't be autocratic. I feel my process has matured and that I am learning how to integrate consultation with other experts into a whole. But my role is to hold it all together – to keep sight of the golden thread of what it is we're trying to do and achieve. And at the same time I want to make the other people feel as if they own it too – that it's not MY project. I've had to learn a lot more about the boundaries involved and at the same time creating an ethos that everyone signs up to.

For Scarlet as an organisation, the CP work was not about capacity building but there has been enough funding to allow us to hire a project manager and to free us up to develop other projects. This has also meant my learning to manage organisational growth.

When we did the first big workshop with Los Sentidos for The Labyrinth project, the exercises we did with the director, Enrique Vargas, all felt quite familiar. But I realised that it is not about the exercises themselves, per se, but it is what you do with them that really matters – it's about the quality of the experience that you build and share.

The experiential work we did – both very personal and also shared – reminded me of the power of ritual and took me right back to the heart of what theatre is all about. I was also incredibly moved during the exercises, especially when it was my turn to be the focus, at a very profound level because in some sense it was about letting go of responsibility. That kind of experience is beyond words. And I took away the realisation that what is so important is passing on this understanding.

Gráinne Byrne is Scarlet Theatre's Artistic Director and has shaped the company's vision for the last fourteen years. Gráinne is an actor, director and teacher and has performed in most of Scarlet shows.

"That has been another development for me; finding a way of talking to people outside my own world of theatre – talking to teachers and other artists."

"I've had to learn a lot more about the boundaries involved and at the same time creating an ethos that everyone signs up to."

What CPLN artists and practitioners have identified

Robert Stephenson drama practitioner and director
Working with other artists in a reflective way allows you the time to think about your own art form and your understanding of it. After working on various projects during the last year I believe more and more that drama/physical theatre/art are more than just art forms, they are part of a whole education of the child. Once you start to understand this you are able to refocus your start point or goals or inputs. I now think about the bigger picture much more and how to engage the young people, their families, peers, and other teachers.

Daniela Essart artistic director, Scarabeus
Working with Creative Partnerships (CP) has given Scarabeus scope to expand some areas of our practice that have been on the dream pipe for a while, and had not had a chance to be explored in more depth. It has given us ground for experimentation, for growing ideas, and playing with them. We can do and undo in a safe environment, although with the exhilaration of the risk taking.

The creative process is such a personal state of mind and heart, and the approach is so different from person to person. For me it has confirmed that our thinking style is also accessible for people who do not deal with making art as their main priority. It has also given me a quiet confidence in what I believe most as an artist: art doesn't belong to who creates it, but it will stay with who receives it.

Dan Ecclestone composer and pianist
I benefited enormously from the experience of leading these workshops largely as a result of recognizing misapprehensions in my students that I had once laboured under, or obstacles I had previously encountered and then overcome. I was therefore able to perceive clearly the distance I had travelled in my own personal development, which as a result led to a more certain sense of authority.

Further to this, the experience sharpened my understanding of the creative process as I was able to witness the variety of responses to identical stimuli. This has since allowed me to better understand the imperceptible processes behind my own intuitive choices and responses – in other words, behind my own creativity.

Victoria Coker filmmaker
Since becoming involved with CP in 2006, I have been inspired to enrol on a MA in Cross Sectoral & Community Arts at Goldsmith's College. The experiences gained from working in schools as part of the initiative has led me to develop and enhance my own creative practice within wider community settings. My ambition is to set up a community film production company specializing in educational, community and third sector film projects.

Lynne Brackley practitioner and creative agent
Working alongside teachers and other staff so that we build on each other's ideas in partnership has been very enlightening. Empathy has been a recurring theme. I have been able to use my ability to play a variety of roles, not to deceive but to understand the different perspectives of those who make up a school community.

Another big thing for me was working with another artist in a project exploring the outdoor environment in a school. Our approaches to the materials we worked with were completely different: he was interested in the nature of the materials themselves while I was more concerned with the stories we could tell with them. I gained access to a whole new way of working through this partnership.

Natalie Jeal creative agent
Having the opportunity to work with so many different, creative people and being encouraged to "spark" off each other to bring about change is such an inspirational way of working.

A transformative moment was working at a special school and hearing staff talking about their perceptions of students after a sensory/movement session in a pool. They were actually liberating themselves of preconceived (and rather limited) ideas about the student's abilities. The CP projects in the school have started healing the school, encouraging staff to work together in different ways and enabling young people with profound impairments to advocate for each other.

The Labyrinth:

navigating creativity

A labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. The Labyrinth represents a journey to our own centre and back again out into the world.

Labyrinths and mazes are often confused. A labyrinth is not a maze. A maze is like a puzzle to be solved but a labyrinth has only one path designed to help us find our way. The way in is the way out.

It is a Friday morning and bright autumnal sunshine is falling on a thin stretch of beach at Harwich, at the further reaches of the eastern Essex coast. Across the estuary are the towering cranes and container ships of Felixstowe port but here on the sand are a scattering of isolated figures moving reflectively among the boats and at the edge of the low tide. Occasionally they move and stretch in the light breeze or stoop to examine driftwood or shells.

Half an hour later, ten artists are in a community room ten steps from the beach wall all working quietly, intensely, both in their own space but also with a tacit sense of groupness. One is moving through the space feeling how a giant piece of tissue paper rises, falls, crumples and smoothes into fresh planes. Another is playing with notions of random lengths of string as the ball uncurls and placing bits of beach detritus on those points. Another is carefully cutting out the words 'what does validation look like?' in sand coloured tissue paper on the floor.

What is the purpose of this and what does it have to do with the Labyrinth project? Today is a Tertulia (a Spanish word meaning an informal get-together of a group of people with shared interests) and it is one of several that have taken place through the course of this project.

The genesis of this project lies in an overall commitment to the art and nature of 'questioning': how to ask questions, how to make collaborative enquiries across disciplines and to encourage a genuine spirit of research within artistic practice. Today is a snapshot in time of the development of The Labyrinth – an ambitious, extended vision of collaborative, creative partnership working, involving a guru of experiential theatre, a Spanish theatre group, three Creative Partnerships (CP) areas, six schools (two in each area) and a diverse range of artists and creative practitioners.

A year previously, inspiration for the project had been found in Enrique Vargas, director of Teatro de los Sentidos. Vargas' work is based on asking questions; and using experiential practice and the senses to explore those questions; heightening the sensory responses of the audience and inviting them to rediscover the power of sense through the

combination of storytelling and smell, touch, taste.

Ongoing conversations with Enrique Vargas reflected perfectly the Creative Partnerships London North (CPLN) idea of generating creative enquires led by mutual questioning. They led to a project involving artists from three CP areas: as Anita Belli, the Director of CP Tendring explained:

"The Tertulia process is based around the principle of a peer group offering each other support, challenge and feedback to develop practice. Through a stepped process, the group may help to turn a fledgling idea into a workshop session or simply deepen their individual and collective understanding of a new or existing area of practice. The set members then discuss, evaluate and review the work and explore the shared experience, aiming to articulate insights and highlight resonances. This then impacts on the practice of the participants and develops their skills at communicating this depth of understanding to the children they work with in Creative Partnerships."

The starting point for the Labyrinth project was to invite Enrique Vargas and Company to come and run an extended workshop for the artists involved. This duly took place at the Norwich Festival. During the extremely intense, revelatory week the artists formulated the idea of a sensory Labyrinth that would be created in schools in the three areas. During the months ahead, the planning and imagineering would be done as a group to explore how different artist collectives develop their ideas for their particular school environments. This approach would also maximize the cross fertilization of ideas and solutions.

The Harwich Tertulia is the third group meeting: the Labyrinths are all planned to be in place within two and a half months so there is much to do. But the day starts with creative sessions led by each artist. The first session has involved what Mark has called 'beach flirts and essences'. He asks everyone to focus on something on the beach and use it as a starting point to explore its essence and find ways of expressing it. Someone asks him why use the word flirt and he talks about slowing down and letting objects jump into your consciousness, how flirting is about a sense of connection and to take this energy and process it through the imagination.

"During the months ahead, the planning and imagineering would be done as a group to explore how different artist collectives develop their ideas for their particular school environments."

"We are normally very task and outcome oriented and to break from this and just explore for no other reason than to feel is a delightful process. But then you need to take this a step further and work out ways of making this type of experience accessible to children".

Charlie says that these days offer a rare opportunity to investigate an individual response to things:

"I get a lot of insight into myself on these occasions. You get given time – and that's in short supply. Sometimes these sessions can feel a bit like 'been there/done that' but then you always get surprised by the diversity of what other people do and challenged by what they come up with. I was in the school for the first session planning The Labyrinth and for me today is about tuning and processing a lot of what went on with the kids".

In the afternoon, everyone watches a film made in the school the previous day and this kick starts a combination of observations and discussion about where things could go next.

The CPLN project is led by Scarlet theatre and its artistic director Gráinne Byrne. She explains how they have two classes – a year 6 in primary and a year 8 secondary class and how they have already carried out an inset day.

"The idea is that there is a journey to be made into the middle of the labyrinth and out again: this is in the form of a chain reaction. A blindfolded participant will be led to the centre by someone wearing headphones, receiving auditory and visual instructions along the way. The blindfolded person then has their blindfold removed and in turn receives their headphones, in order to lead their new blindfolded recipient around the circuit. Thus it is a journey taken in pairs; they will share their experience, switching senses as it were. The experience is designed to be a mixture of terrifying, comforting, peaceful, disorienting and funny – all felt through the senses. There will be a sense of sharing the story – so that everyone will make up a collective sense of what happened inside the Labyrinth and what it meant to everyone."

Ideas fly round – bringing summer inside into December with lighting and grass (someone strongly suggests turf rather than attempting to grow from seed), listening to birdsong, but then some form of auditory dislocation so that the individual needs to turn to their partner to help understand the narrative. Blind photography is suggested as a way of feeling and touching something and taking a picture. They return to a

central idea of Los Sentidos which is to pass on an experience to another person: people will enter the Labyrinth and come out and give something to someone else, either in the form of a chain reaction in which one person leads another or is led.

The project is artist led but the aim is also to foster collaborative enquiry with the teachers and children. So for the artists involved, the R&D element of the process is not only a crucial aspect of the way in which the project grows but is also there to encourage them to stretch their own artistic development. This process is rooted in the context of how it would work in the school environment.

The afternoon segues from creative discussion to pragmatic planning and back again. How to make an experience such as The Labyrinth into learning space within the school and turn it from a finite event into something longer lasting? How to make the Labyrinth projects work alongside the December frenzy of preparing for the school Christmas show? The ten artists work as a team, even though their projects will be separate. And their commitment to this sensory, experiential work will form a journey for themselves and for all involved with, at its heart, a desire to pass on a depth of understanding and imagination to the children and young people they work with.

“They return to a central idea of Los Sentidos which is to pass on an experience to another person…”

Credits

The collaborating artists on this publication are:
Gráinne Byrne www.scarlettheatre.co.uk
Angeline Conaghan www.barkmusic.com
Robert Jarvis www.robertjarvis.co.uk
Barry Lewis www.barrylewisphotography.com
Jonathan Petherbridge www.londonbubble.org.uk
Suzette Rocca www.soul-jazz-dance.co.uk
Robert Stephenson www.unclassifiedarts.com
Daniela Essart www.scarabeus.co.uk
Dan Ecclestone, Victoria Coker, Lynne Brackley, Natalie Jeal

Creative Partnerships London North

Jocelyn Cunningham, Creative Director
For over 25 years Jocelyn has worked in theatre and film, mostly as an actor in both Canada and the UK as well as teaching, designing and facilitating education programmes for children, educators and creative practitioners. This background has informed the creation of development opportunities for both the education and creative sectors and Creative Partnerships has been the perfect place to bring both areas of her life together.

Natasha Silsby, Programmer
Having trained in theatre, Natasha rapidly moved into community arts working as an outreach artist. Placing artists as partners and exploring terms of partnership has motivated and informed her approaches to developing a programme at Creative Partnerships London North.

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Hannah is a digital media consultant who has worked extensively for Creative Partnerships, developing the online brand and writing for the National Office and CP area offices.

Produced by Kirsten Burrows
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Installation by Kirsten Burrows, idea by Cindy Oswin (quotation by Michael Faraday 1791-1867)

Page 28-29 Barry Lewis

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Gráinne Byrne photo by Mark Hamilton, designed by Nick Havas

Angeline Conaghan photo by Annie Zorzo

Barry Lewis photo by Jonathon Olley

Robert Jarvis photo by Chris George

Jonathan Petherbridge photo by Barry Lewis

Suzette Rocca photo by Maria Tolly

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