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CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON

SIX STORIES OF CREATIVITY AND PARTNERSHIP

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GALLIONS PRIMARY SCHOOL
ISLINGTON ARTS AND MEDIA SCHOOL
LAURISTON PRIMARY SCHOOL
STORMONT HOUSE SCHOOL
THOMAS TALLIS SCHOOL**

SARAH B DAVIES

CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON ISLINGTON ARTS AND MEDIA SCHOOL

Islington Arts and Media School (IAMS) is a smaller than average secondary school based in the London Borough of Islington, serving a range of socially, ethnically and culturally diverse neighbouring communities. It became a specialist media arts school in 2004, and in 2009 it acquired Trust status.

The school began its first Creative Partnerships project in 2003 and became a School of Creativity in 2008. Since the end of Creative Partnerships in 2011 the school continues to value a creative approach across the curriculum for its benefits to staff, students and the wider community.

Judy Gemmell, Deputy Headteacher from 2001 to 2012, tells the story of IAMS' Creative Partnerships experience and its progression since.

IMAGES

All images courtesy
of Islington Arts and
Media School



About the school prior to Creative Partnerships

IAMS (formerly George Orwell School) started out as a 'Fresh Start' school in September 1999 with new staff, a new structure and an ethos of educating young people through the arts. The school hadn't received specialist status at that stage but it had a commitment to the arts at governing level. In its first academic year there were significant changes in school leadership, extremely poor GCSE results compared to the rest of the country and Ofsted put the school into special measures. It took a very long time for the school to recover. When I joined the school as deputy head in January 2001 the school aimed to gain specialist status in performing arts and media and share the arts department's methodology across the rest of the school's departments. IAMS came out of special measures in 2001, because Ofsted recognised the progress and purpose being shown across the curriculum, and we gained specialist status in 2004. The ethos of Creative Partnerships seemed to marry well with the ethos of the school; to use the arts to explore creativity and help make the curriculum richer and more motivating.

Our first Creative Partnerships project was with the Almeida Theatre in Islington in 2003 and as the years went on we did a lot of work around student voice and participation. The programme also enabled the school to convert to using arts methods within other subjects. We achieved Artsmark Gold and we were involved in a research project with LSE (led by Creative Partnerships London East). The next step was to apply for School of Creativity status, which we were awarded in 2008.

Being a School of Creativity was a status symbol, we were recognised for our creativity and we felt we could help other schools by telling our story. We also set up a bursary programme for our staff to work with students to devise a series of creative lessons, watched and evaluated by the students. This research provided information about where students saw creativity in lessons. Being a School of Creativity gave us the authority to do that kind of research.

Projects and Partnerships

The Creative Partnerships ethos was to work from the school's needs outwards.

This was a change in the culture of practice; instead of being the receivers of a creative offer we were being asked 'what are your school's needs, what do you want to explore, who would be the right partner and how can you sustain this work?' For example, we wanted to explore and build student voice and we began to use radio across the curriculum in partnership with Somethin' Else, which was a new approach to creative teaching and learning for us. Using radio as a learning tool worked well; the students worked in different departments and interviewed people in different subject areas to produce their own radio programme. The students were really enthused by this work and it encouraged their participation in planning and evaluation.

Creative Partnerships promoted a constant redevelopment and refining of ideas. Not all projects had wonderful end products although the processes were all very interesting. This was part of the learning process. **You have to take risks in the process; there is no point in knowing what is going to happen at the end.** We also learned that you have to give partnership projects adequate time to be able to see real changes and developments – if you expect to be able to do things too quickly they won't work.

Change and Impact

Creative Partnerships helped to embed a commitment to creativity and using the arts methodology across the school's curriculum. Now that there are more curriculum constraints and time is even tighter, creativity could be under threat. But because the school's ethos is committed to it, and the governors and staff are convinced of its worth, it won't be lost or watered down. In 2006 we appointed an assistant headteacher in charge of creativity to the SMT (Senior Management Team) which was a sign of the school protecting and valuing our creative approach.

I think we measure our success in various ways, including the journey the young people take, their attainment, and the school's ethos and outlook. We also believe it is about the softer things that are harder to measure, e.g. a shift in attitudes, which is why we have done research projects. It is difficult to attribute exam results or raised levels to our creative approach, but other things can be measured such as attendance which may indicate motivation. We were aware from the beginning that creative skills were transferable to other subjects and Creative Partnerships was an enormously important part of the school's journey to get us there. At our school we believe in building rounded individuals and decision makers. Teamwork, communication skills, problem solving, risk taking, rising to a challenge, inquisitiveness, imagination – these are all things you need in science as well as poetry.

The arts methodology has proved positive for students of all backgrounds and the students have really responded to embedding this approach across different subject areas. We have such a diverse school with significant social deprivation and high numbers eligible for free school meals. Our approach has allowed freedom of expression, enjoyment in class and is a motivator for participation. Students have gained greater skills in articulation, self-esteem and confidence – things these students often lack. **Our parents can see the results and know that their children are gaining a lot from arts across the curriculum.**

Creativity is a strong thread within our staff appraisal system and we've also found that when new staff join the school they rise to the way the school works – there is an understanding that this is our ethos.

The school's impact within the wider community has been increased by the development of the Community Arts Co-ordinator role. This member of staff works hard at making connections with local groups and enhances the reputation of the school through our involvement in arts events such as carnivals, festivals etc. Additionally the school has a new 250 capacity theatre, funded by the Building Schools for the Future which has been developed with community use in mind – a brand new theatre for the local area.

Looking forward

Judy Gemmell was asked to use her learning and experience of creative approaches and partnership working to advise other schools that are interested in similar work.

On what is critical to making creative programmes work in a school setting:

- support from Senior Management to make a commitment
- time and resources (both are under pressure)
- space in the curriculum.

Recommendations and suggestions to schools seeking out new creative partnerships:

- look at your curriculum and what your school needs
- look to local area organisations – it is easier to work with local organisations and artists as the larger national companies are less likely to tailor projects to what your school needs
- go to organisations like A New Direction to get help to make bridges and links with creative practitioners and to access networks
- value the process as much as the product and put milestones in place so you can monitor the process as you go along
- the partnership also needs to have a flexible approach – if a project is going in a different direction that might work better, it may be more interesting and worth changing things.

Value the process as much as the product and put milestones in place so you can monitor the process as you go along.

School links and project examples

www.iamschool.co.uk

Methodology in Practice, case study 2005

www.anewdirection.org.uk/_ajax/call/asset/get_asset/273/0/0/0/0/1

Institutional Change by Kevin McDonnell and Mary Huane, 2006

www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/institutional-change

Six Shorts: Films about Creativity, Partnership and School (including Building a Learning Environment through Partnership, a film about IAMS), 2004

www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/six-shorts-films-about-creativity-partnership-and-school



A New Direction

A New Direction connects children, young people and education with the best of arts and culture in London.

We believe that together we can make London the best city in the world for young people's cultural and creative development. We campaign for the value of arts and culture to the lives of all young Londoners. We promote practical ways that schools and other institutions can develop cultural opportunities. We work with arts and cultural partners to ensure the highest quality in work with children and young people.

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