

Partnership example: Acton High School

Acton High School is a larger than average mixed comprehensive secondary school in the London Borough of Ealing, with specialist status in media arts and applied learning. The school serves students from a diverse range of socio-economic and ethnic minority backgrounds. Ofsted rated the school as good in 2009.

Partnership aims and objectives

Through the three year Change School Programme (2008-11), Acton High School aimed to establish a model of working with a partnership organisation that would enable the school to understand the historic, social and employment contexts of the local area and encourage staff to be confident to look outside school for new learning opportunities. This was to be an outward looking community focussed school. The objectives of this model included:

- To position the school as a centre for creative learning in the community
- To improve networking strengths and build links to support the work related curriculum and skills base
- To ensure creativity and the use of outside partners is readily included in all stages of planning and recognised as a key component of curriculum delivery
- To develop social inclusion, community cohesion and enterprise opportunities for young people
- To develop a structure/framework for future partnership work (specifically with primary schools)
- To impact on the learning, aspiration and achievement of students through working with local partners and 'placemakers'

Projects

2008/09: The partnership was between the school, London Transport Museum, a local primary school and parents. A cross year/cross schools project focusing on museum collections, stories and histories about local area. Subject areas included Art and design, Citizenship, Design Technology, English, Geography, History, ICT and vocational subjects. The main artforms for the activity were literature and visual arts.

2009/10: The partnership was between the school, London Transport Museum, a local primary school and involved parents and families. A Year 7 and Year 11 cross-curricular project exploring notions of place and stories about the local area and the importance of public transport to the locality. The project also included ASDAN CoPE level 1 qualification for Year 11 students and teachers in Early Years settings. Subject areas included Art and design, Citizenship, Design Technology, English, Geography, History, and vocational subjects. The main artforms for the activity were literature and visual arts.

2010/11: The partnership was between the school, London Transport Museum, Gunnersbury Museum and a local primary school. A project across multiple year groups enabled students to research the local impact of the Second World War and further explore and map the town, creating posters, interactive maps and workshops for primary school pupils. Subject areas included Art and design, English, Geography, History, and ICT. The main artforms for the activity were multidisciplinary arts, literature and visual arts.

Significant project stages for partners

- Identification of priority areas for the work by reviewing the School Development Plan and relating the work to the school's specialisms
- A Creative Agent is involved in planning the project strands and helping to define the learning objectives.
- Selection of London Transport Museum as an appropriate local partner for the duration of the three year programme.
- Selection of 2 curriculum areas (excluding art and design) to integrate the project into class activities.
- Each year project sessions were divided into different strands for different groups of participants (students of different ages from Acton High and feeder primary schools, parents and teachers) and to cover different themes.
- Development of specialism Flexidays - 12 Flexidays a year enable staff to be creative with the planning of these days.
- Development of school's family learning programme from January 2010.
- Dissemination events and web-based outputs document and celebrate the findings and achievements.
- Creative Agent monitors and supports delivery through mid point and end point evaluation process.

Outcomes from the three year programme

School's outcomes:

- **Curriculum delivery** The school developed Specialism Flexidays: 12 Flexidays a year that experiment with different groupings and learning spaces, with different "teachers" and timescales for outcomes. Additionally the school continued to develop collaborative projects between specialism leaders and primary school partners outside of the Creative Partnerships programme.
- **Community and family relationships** Participation in the school's community learning programme continued to increase across the wider community and families. Parents have showed greater engagement with school and education.
- **Partnership experience** The school built a highly successful partnership with London Transport Museum which became a valuable vehicle to deliver new projects, maintaining the schools' momentum for change and delivering positive outcomes for young people. The partnership provided opportunities to apply for other funding bids to expand the school's research into local history.

Teachers' outcomes:

- **Creative teaching** Participating teachers and assistants learned the value of using creativity and creative professionals to draw out students and shift the focus of how they engage with and process information.
- **Bigger picture** Staff benefitted from experiencing how the local surrounding area can impact on student engagement, making subjects like history more relevant.

Student outcomes:

- **Learning and attainment** Students keenly engaged with the activities through the new skills and learning environments offered by the partners and attainment is set to improve as a result. The young people enjoyed taking part and the school saw an increase in engagement and motivation in learning. Students gained new skills and understandings that go beyond those specific to the subject in which they are assessed. They developed teamwork and leadership skills, independence being in charge of their own learning, learned professional, technical, project management skills and communication skills (especially relevant for EAL students)

- **Bigger picture** The projects provided context and purpose to students' learning, grounding it in real situations outside of the classroom and making subjects more relevant.

Practitioner outcomes:

- **Empowering young people** Practitioners developed a solid understanding of the benefits of providing students with maximum ownership and direction in projects. This learning was a direct result of partnership working and a cross-discipline approach.

The value of partnerships with the creative sector

- **Engagement within the school** Teachers and students found greater motivation and engagement through the unifying theme provided by the London Transport Museum. Teachers used the theme to find new links between subjects and within the school. Additionally they were reinvigorated about their own subject areas through contact with the external practitioners, who understood both the local and academic context of the project. The practitioners took the time to engage students as individuals and helped coax the best out of people. Teachers could see students finding their voices and becoming more confident in speaking out. They are more able to input into their learning by doing so.
- **Community relations** Through the project the school was able to develop stronger relationships with London Transport Museum, other schools, artists, parents and the wider community.
- **Expertise** Students and staff benefitted from the combination of the skills, resources and expertise of creative practitioners that complemented and enhanced those of teachers and delivering cross-curricular learning.
- **New learning environments** Incorporating museums, other schools and individuals and groups of local residents enabled learning to take place beyond the classroom in different, inspiring and enjoyable contexts.

Advice when undertaking new partnerships

Acton High School learned the difficulty of building relationships quickly when dealing with other school settings, especially if other schools are not accustomed to this type of partnership work. Once a school has travelled the journey and has had a good experience, there is a firmer base on which to build new work quickly. The schools that embrace partnership opportunities best are often those with whom there are already strong relationships.