

Transformations

Cambridge School

Hammersmith and Fulham

Outline

Cambridge School is a community special school for children with learning difficulties and complex needs. The school was greatly inspired by its initial participation in London West's Dream School engagement programme and resolved to transform its teaching and learning through creativity.

The school aimed to break down subject barriers, improve students' self-esteem and develop literacy and numeracy skills. To do this, the school explored the development of a 'Cambridge Method', a new curriculum based on the principles of Reggio Emilia, an Italian educational philosophy focused on pre-school and primary education, specially adapted for the secondary special school context.

About Cambridge School

Cambridge School is a community special school in Hammersmith for children aged 11 to 16 with moderate learning difficulties and complex needs.

Over the past few years an increasing number of pupils joining the school have had social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Pupils come from diverse backgrounds and just over half are currently eligible for free school meals. Around two-thirds of pupils are from a variety of minority ethnic groups, and some are at an early stage of learning English. There are twice as many boys as girls. A few pupils are in the care of the local authority or are from refugee or asylum-seeking families.

Project context

The school's head teacher, Olivia Meyrick, had been in post for about a year when she applied for Cambridge School to become a core school in Creative Partnerships London West's programme. Olivia was keen to transform the teaching and learning in the school through creativity, and to explore the possibility of developing a new curriculum to suit the needs of Cambridge students. The priorities for 2006/07 were to:

- Develop creativity and break down barriers between subject areas
- Develop outreach and work with children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their teachers in mainstream schools
- Improve self-esteem and extend what young people can do
- Use creativity to address literacy and numeracy skills
- Develop staff and student creativity and knowledge of Creative Partnerships

Number of pupils involved:

54

Number of sessions:

90

Number of teachers and support staff involved:

33

Year groups involved:

Year 7,8,10 &11

Creative partners:

Sightlines Initiative –

Liz Elders and

Deborah Aguirre Jones

Nick Makoha

Kat Francois

The Puppet Centre –

Natalie Querol



Deborah Aguirre Jones
Based in Bristol, artist Deborah Aguirre Jones has been working with public spaces, participation and collaboration for over ten years. Using sculpture, photography, film, drawing, performance and other media she sets up encounters, conversations and collaborations to address questions and themes with other people, often exploring our experiences and representations of the outdoors and co-constructed meaning.

Jones' approach to art-making is based on inquiry and research. As an associate of The Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, she has an interest in different ways of knowing such as presentational and experiential knowledge. She frequently collaborates with educators and organisations.

Challenges

To work towards these goals, the school leadership team identified three challenges they felt most affected the development of creativity in the classroom:

- Recall and retention of information
- Delayed processing of information
- Complex needs of the students

To some extent, teachers' attitudes were also part of the challenge. Whilst staff members were clearly very committed to the school and its pupils, there was initially some resistance to the idea of curriculum change.

Also, as in many special schools, some of the adults were reluctant to let students take risks. If something didn't work there was the risk of a perceived failure. So it was important that the school's Creative Partnerships programme developed through genuine collaboration and consultation with the entire staff team, so that teachers could identify where, how and to what extent they would be involved.

Dream School inspiration

Cambridge School's first Creative Partnerships project was participation in the London West Dream School initiative, an engagement programme that asked children and young people about their school to help identify areas in which creativity could be applied to teaching and learning. A group of students attended a Thinking and Doing Day with 15 other schools from the borough. Students took part in a range of creative workshops including dance, theatre and poetry, then reported on their experience.



Teachers were amazed at the confidence of the young people who took part in the workshops, in particular the session with performance poets Nick Makoha and Kat Francois. Following the Thinking and Doing Day, ten students requested to work with Nick and Kat over six sessions towards a performance of original poems to students and staff. Andy Smith, who later became the school's CP co-ordinator, said of one student's performance:

"I could never have imagined he could do this if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes... he's achieved so much."

The success of the project meant the school collectively felt more confident in its work with creative practitioners to transform learning, and was able to see the big picture envisioned in the programme's aims.

Transformations

In the autumn term of 2006, a twilight INSET (In-Service Education and Training, also known as teacher training) day was held to explore approaches to creativity within the curriculum.

Discussions followed across the school, led by Andy Smith, the school's CP co-ordinator and Olivia Meyrick, the head teacher. It was agreed that the overall aim of the school's Creative Partnerships programme would be to explore and adapt the Reggio Emilia practice; a well-respected Italian educational philosophy focused on early education that Cambridge School felt could be successfully adapted to the secondary special school context.

Sightlines Initiative
Sightlines Initiative is a self-funded, independent, organisation of a broad team of early years practitioners and facilitators who develop initiatives and projects aimed at 'breaking the mould' of traditional practice in a variety of settings.

In partnership with Newcastle City Council, Sightlines Initiative hosted the first English showing of Reggio Emilia's Hundred Languages of Children Exhibition in 1997. They have established links with 'Reggio Children' and the Reggio Emilia Institute in Stockholm.

Current and ongoing initiatives include the development of a UK/Reggio reference point for educators and artists and 'Creative Foundation' which features 7 x early childhood projects working in relationship with artists and forming a close-knit practice and research group.



Putting Reggio Emilia to work

Named after the Italian town where it originated, Reggio Emilia emerged after the Second World War as educators, parents and children worked together to reconstruct society under the leadership of Loris Malaguzzi, the philosophy's founder. Since its development, the Reggio Emilia pre-school educational model has been emulated around the world, particularly in North America.

Reggio Emilia is based upon the principles that children must have control over their learning direction, be allowed to explore ideas, and should have ways and opportunities to express themselves. The approach was chosen to develop a 'Cambridge Method', a new method of creative learning and teaching in the school. The aims of the project were to:

- Work with Reggio Emilia principles and professionals
- Work with creative organisations
- Provide continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for the whole school staff
- Organise a series of Exploration and Research Days in the school

The Sightlines Initiative was chosen as the lead creative partner. This agency supports creative thinking and practice in early childhood services across the UK – it is also a reference point for the Reggio Children Network, an international centre for the promotion of children's potential and rights. The Sightlines Initiative develops practices in early education that promote the growth of children's creative potential through innovative projects, reflective practice, advocacy, training, support and professional networking between artists and educators.

Key features of the Reggio Emilia philosophy for the Cambridge Method:

- Children are continually researching, even when they are not aware of the process
- Projects are based on children's interests
- A cross-curricular approach to learning
- Documentation and reflection makes learning visible

Theory into practice

The school programme initially consisted of a research and development phase during which Sightlines led a number of Exploration Days with the whole staff team. Four lead teachers attended a study week in Reggio Emilia over Easter 2007, following which the Cambridge Method was applied in the school summer term. These projects were led by participating teachers with the guidance and support of the Sightlines practitioners.

Four other teachers at Cambridge were interested in more hands-on ideas and tips to animate their teaching. The teachers worked with Natalie Querol from the Puppet Centre and Nick Makoha from Youth Poetry Network to develop creative approaches to the challenges presented by the school's changing demographic, and the students' complex learning and emotional difficulties.



Impact and outcomes

At the outset of the project there were concerns over the degree to which the Cambridge Method would be adopted. However, in the 2006/07 academic years, eight out of the 12 teachers in the staff team became closely involved in the programme, with two more teachers participating in creative projects funded directly by the school. The school is now working towards Specialist Arts Status and plans to submit its bid during 2008.

Future thinking

The school's programme in 2007/08 represents a further development in the exploration of Reggio Emilia practice and curriculum change. This is the next stage in the school's journey to build on the Cambridge Method and further develop its approaches to creative teaching and learning. In this programme phase, a creative facilitator in residence will work with three classes across Years 7, 8 and 10 to develop projects that respond to the students' needs, interests and learning styles. The aims are to:

- Enhance the creative learning and practices developed and complement the staff team
- Explore and develop reflection and evaluation processes used in last year's Reggio Emilia programme
- Respond to and explore students' needs, interests and learning styles through multi-sensory experiences
- Develop appropriate approaches to personal reflection that students will be comfortable engaging in
- Promote participating students' confidence, self-expression and independence

Lucy Crompton

Lucy Crompton – Writer
Lucy Crompton was the Director of Creative Partnerships London West from July 2005 until the start of 2008, establishing the strategy and team. She worked with Programme Manager Carole Morrison, to develop key partnerships and devise the creative programme for the area. This followed six months working in the National Office of Creative Partnerships, where she developed a new strategy for engaging the cultural sector at a national level.

Lucy's previous experience includes working for the Refugee Council as the National Co-ordinator of Refugee Week, and for Arts & Business, the National Theatre and the Space (St Paul's Arts Centre).

Liz Elders

During her teaching career Liz Elders taught in state Nursery and Infant classes and subsequently managed and taught in her own private nursery for 20 years. The nursery was part of the '5x5x5 = Creativity' action research project in the South West, working in collaboration with artists and cultural centres.

She is now an independent trainer and ReFocus consultant working with Reggio-inspired, UK-referenced projects across the country. She works with educators who are interested or engaged in a creative reflective pedagogy, supporting them to carry out research, explore new practices or undergo professional development.

In October 2008, the three London Creative Partnerships teams (London East and South, London North and London West) joined together to become **A New Direction**, a new independent organisation delivering Creative Partnerships' three new programme strands (Enquiry Schools, Change Schools and Schools of Creativity) in schools across the capital, and extending its reach to 21 London boroughs. The organisation is also looking to develop other strands of work outside of the Creative Partnerships programme. For more information about A New Direction visit the website – www.anewdirection.org.uk

From July 2005 until the end of September 2008 **Creative Partnerships London West** (CPLW) operated across three London boroughs; Brent, Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham. These boroughs reflect the changing demographic and diversity of the capital, and are home to large communities from Algeria to Somalia. They host the moving populations of travellers across the country as well as the recent arrivals from Eastern Europe. There are a large number of mosques, markets and shiny shopping malls. Fast food outlets and Pound Shops sit on the same stretch as well heeled restaurants and gastro-pubs. There are pockets of wealth and deprivation, and in many schools at least 40 different languages are spoken. It is a truly diverse area.

In developing a programme of work for the schools in the area, CPLW was keen from the outset, to explore issues that were relevant and pertinent to the locality. In collaboration with the CPLW Partnership Board, which consisted of representatives from the three Local Authorities, it was agreed to focus the 44 schools on a creative programme of work that would research one or more of the following themes: Literacy and language, Creativity in the curriculum, Student voice, Media and new technology, Wider community and diversity. The selected case studies reflect these themes and aim to give a real sense of the 'stories' before, during and after each creative project.

Carole Morrison
Programme Director

A New Direction

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