

Whole school case studies



Creative Partnerships

This much we know...

Whole school case studies

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Introduction – by David Parker, Research Director, Creative Partnerships

Isolating the impacts of complex programmes like Creative Partnerships is notoriously difficult. Creativity manifests itself as an outcome through a variety of forms. These might include the creation of particular products or artefacts, changes to personal interaction or value systems or changes to the environment. Each of these has its own sub-set of complexities that make 'measurement' of impact a fraught business.

One of the clear advantages of qualitative research, and particularly case studies, is that they lend themselves to exploring the nuances that help point towards possible cause and effect relationships.

This selection from a collection of case studies by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) forms a key part of the first phase of research and evaluation across the Creative Partnerships programme. Taken one by one, they offer detailed insights into particular schools and the key projects they have been involved in through Creative Partnerships. Through this we learn about the specific opportunities and challenges afforded by participation in Creative Partnerships. Read collectively, they begin to suggest particular impacts and outcomes that may be generic – increases in the self-esteem and confidence of both pupils and teachers, a sense of purpose or relevance to school-based work and a rethinking of the core principles and approaches in education.

One of the interesting facets revealed by these case studies is the wide variety of contexts each school finds itself in. Although Creative Partnerships is situated across 36 areas of deprivation, not all the schools we work with conform to widespread conceptions of under-achievement. Some schools are delivering consistently high results academically. The Priory School in Slough, for example, is working with Creative Partnerships to create a balance between high achievement and creative teaching and learning – can the same high level of achievement be maintained without the implicit narrow focus on tests and grades? In contrast, Deansfield school in the Black Country worked with Creative Partnerships to develop the capacity of staff, especially in relation to teaching and learning styles. In a context where lower expectation and limited ambition can stymie the development of a full, rich educational experience, Creative Partnerships helped to reset the boundaries for staff and pupils alike.

In summary then, these case studies are valuable in helping to highlight successes, identifying what is specific to each and at the same time common to all. They also point out challenges to the Creative Partnerships process, giving us a basis for reflection as we reshape our programme to capitalise on lessons learnt as we move into our busiest phase, with high volumes of work taking place across all 36 areas across England.

To read all 11 NFER case studies visit www.creative-partnerships.com



Case Study 1: Glade Hill School, Nottingham

Glade Hill Primary School became a CP school in 2002. The research team visited the school during February 2004 and conducted interviews with the headteacher, the CP coordinator, a class teacher, who was also the school's Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO), two governors, one creative provider and 11 children from Years 1 to 6. A second creative provider was interviewed by telephone at a later date.

The school

Glade Hill Primary School is located in the outskirts of the city of Nottingham. It is a Community Nursery and Primary School, taking girls and boys aged three to 11. The most recent Ofsted Report (2001) noted that with 266 pupils, the school is larger than most primary schools, and that children entering the school were generally attaining at a level that was below the national average. At 29 per cent, the number of children who were identified as having special educational needs was relatively high. Nine percent of the children were from minority ethnic groups, most of whom were of African-Caribbean origin.

What did the school set out to achieve?

Prior to Creative Partnerships, the school had often worked with artists, but their involvement had been limited to 'off the peg' projects which connected with specific aspects of the school's curriculum. Through CP, the headteacher wanted all members of the school community to be involved in the process of creating a permanent outdoor space that would provide a stimulating environment for play. The headteacher felt that play was very important in the development of children's communication, social, speaking and listening skills, imagination and creativity. Staff had noted that children often had poor social and play skills when they started school. Staff had welcomed developments in the Foundation Stage curriculum (for children in Nursery, reception and Year 1) that emphasised the importance of play. They had also identified practical play as a strategy for helping to engage older children.

The school had already secured funding from the DfES 'Sporting Playgrounds' initiative to fund the costs of materials and building of an outdoor play area. They therefore decided to focus Creative Partnership activities on the involvement of the whole school in the development of ideas for the playground. The school set out to achieve this by giving children the opportunity to work with various creative providers to develop the children's ideas about the use of space. They also wanted to raise children's awareness of their own bodies and senses through exploring and utilising different spaces. The headteacher reported that he felt that the curriculum had been 'squeezed' over recent years, and that this had 'pushed the creative arts off the edge.' He wanted CP activities to enable creativity to 'permeate the curriculum'. In so doing, he wanted to achieve the following five targets:

- to develop children's self-esteem through the creative arts
- to 'bring the spark back into children's learning'
- to re-skill teachers in using creativity in their teaching
- to enable teachers to work with artists
- to broaden and enrich the curriculum.

What did the school do?

Initially, teachers decided to engage the children in a project in which they would create an installation or 'environment'. They hoped that this experience would inspire the children to develop ideas that would later contribute to the design of a playground in the school grounds. They hired a large sculpture of a chrysalis made by a well-known sculptor, and set it up in the central hall for two weeks. The chrysalis was large enough for several children to be able to sit inside it. All of the children in the school worked with a multi-media artist to create an installation that transformed the school hall into a 'rainforest' environment, using the chrysalis as a central focus. A sound artist helped the children to create a soundtrack of simulated rainforest noises, using their own bodies and every-day materials such as scrunched-up paper, to create the sounds.

The chrysalis project stimulated ideas about the creative use of space, which the children then developed with two designers who were commissioned to design the playground. Children explored how their bodies moved and related to structures, such as tunnels and ladders, that could be included in the playground. Creative providers encouraged the children to think beyond traditional playground design, to imagine something that was 'really magical.'

Working with the designers, the children interviewed each other to identify the variety of games that they enjoyed playing outdoors, such as card games and role play involving crossing ravines, being on the moon, at sea or in a jungle.

The designers realised that they needed to design a playground that incorporated 'fantasy' space for younger children but was also exciting and physically challenging for older children. They drew out the elements of imaginative and physical play that children seemed to value the most. For example, one member of staff was a keen climber and this enthusiasm had transferred to the children. The designers ensured, therefore, that the playground gave children plenty of opportunities to climb structures. Many of the children said that they wanted the playground to incorporate elements like a 'house' or a 'castle' that they could go inside, as they had been able to do with the chrysalis. The designers therefore incorporated an existing water tower into the design, which provided children with an enclosed and covered space.

The designers involved children in all stages of their planning. As one noted: 'We tried to show them the whole process of how we work and think about things, like measuring up, materials, weather, shelter.' The children made diagrams of their ideas and then produced three-dimensional models of their designs, using a wide range of materials including sewing thread, string, wire, cardboard and balsa wood. Acknowledging the preciousness of teachers' 'free' time, the designers provided home-baked cakes one lunchtime to encourage staff to attend so they could contribute their own ideas to the design of the playground and how its development could best meet curriculum needs.

The designers had worked predominantly with children in Years 3 to 6, taking each class for a weekly session throughout the summer term. However, the whole school, including the youngest children were consulted about which elements of the design to build.

What has been the impact of Creative Partnerships?

Impact on young people

Discussions revealed that CP involvement had positive impacts on children at both individual and whole school level. Both teachers and children reported that CP had positively impacted on children in a variety of ways, all of which reflected the targets as previously described.

Firstly, the activities had impacted on individual children's self-esteem and emotional well-being. It had raised children's expectations of themselves. The CP coordinator commented that: 'meeting people who are enthusiastic and talented, opens children's minds to what's possible and what they can achieve.' Children's social skills had developed through collaborative working. They were encouraged to share ideas with creative providers, teachers and with other children, worked towards a common goal. This helped them to gain confidence in asking questions and learning to value each other's opinions. In so doing, they developed their ability to work as a team. Children had a rota for using the playground, and teachers noticed that the children's participation in the programme appeared to have helped children to respect one another more and to 'treat each other kindly.'

The completed playground provided the children with tangible evidence of their collaborative work, and 'something to be proud of.' The creative provider commented on the importance of the ownership of the project that she felt the children had achieved through their involvement. She compared 'off the peg' playground designs to the Glade Hill Primary playground describing Glade Hill as 'a space which has proper textures... and genuine things.'

Teachers and the children themselves observed that children's involvement in creative activities had increased their enjoyment of school. According to one staff member, CP had 'brought the spark back into children's learning' as they were encouraged to work 'less inhibitedly and be less worried about what is expected... [and be able to] explore their ideas more freely.' Children across the school took it in turns to use the playground during lesson time as well as playtime. One teacher commented that children 'look forward to using it next time and think about how they will use it.'

Another impact of the project related to improvements in children's speaking and listening skills. Teachers noted that the activities had encouraged children to express their own opinions, and to share these with their peers.

The project had also helped to develop children's creative skills. One of the creative providers who worked with the children on the design of the playground noted that she felt that the chrysalis project had 'primed [the children] to be thinking creatively... they were confident and had lots to say... they talked about artwork and sculpture in a mature way.' As a result, she felt that their approach to designing was 'more abstract and more risky' than most children's would have been.

It was felt that CP had helped children to gain an insight into the creative process and of the work of artists and designers. They had witnessed and been part of the whole process of the development of the playground from initial idea to end product. As the CP coordinator said, this had given children 'a huge understanding of what art is and how artists create.'

Other staff mentioned unexpected outcomes, such as the observation that traversing the monkey bars had made some children 'braver' as they had done something they would otherwise not have done. The SENCO commented that CP had helped children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, including some children who were in care. She suggested that the creation of intimate and 'safe' spaces inside the chrysalis and in the playground had been of particular benefit to these children. Children had been given the opportunity to open up and 'voice their feelings' and talk more freely than was usual in the classroom environment.

Impact on teachers

Teachers had worked alongside the creative provider sessions with the children, and this had given them new ideas for approaches and techniques for creative learning. As one teacher said: 'the artists have shown me how to get the best out of children, especially through artwork, and that has helped me a lot.' They said they had greatly enjoyed 'learning from the experts' who also understood teacher needs to develop their own creative skills. The headteacher observed that the learning exchange had been 'a two-way process,' as teachers had also helped creative providers work effectively with children with challenging behaviour and particular needs.

Impact on creative providers

The creative providers who worked on this project had considerable experience of making public art, often as part of small-scale urban regeneration programmes. They specialise in the incorporation of innovative design, sculpture and landscaping through participatory workshops for adults and children. However, this project offered a more sustained experience of working with a whole school over a period of time.

The creative providers enjoyed the project at Glade Hill for a number of reasons. Firstly, they found the high level of contact they had with the children involved in the project to be rewarding, as one of them said: 'We got to know the children well and felt [the playground] grew out of them, and our relationship with them.' Secondly, they took pleasure in the children's enjoyment which resulted from their participation in the project. Thirdly, the project enabled the creative providers to develop their interest in working with sustainable materials and ecologically friendly processes. The creative providers were hoping to build on their experiences at Glade Hill to develop partnerships with other schools in future.

Whole school impact

CP activities appear to have had two main areas of impact on the whole school. Firstly, the headteacher reported that CP had 'raised the profile of the school in the city and in the community.' The launch of Nottingham CP had been held at Glade Hill and this had generated positive interest at both a local and national level. The headteacher was delighted that the school had been seen to 'grasp the opportunity [of CP] with more than two hands.'

Secondly, teachers said that creative activities had helped to develop a sense of community within the school. For example, the CP coordinator described the 'buzz' in the school during the installation of the chrysalis. She said that children had worked together across all key stages and that this had 'fired people's enthusiasm... because everyone came together.' The school held two whole-school assemblies each half term dedicated to children's achievements in creative activities, and parents were invited to attend.

Looking back, looking forward

What were the key factors in making CP work?

There were several factors that contributed towards the success of CP at Glade Hill Primary School. Firstly, the commitment of the school staff to the project was crucial. The CP coordinator was appointed to the staff specifically to lead CP. The venture was new and challenging to her, but she had enthusiasm and relevant experience to take on the role. In order to gain the support of the whole staff, she canvassed all staff to invite their ideas for CP.

Links with the local CP team were very positive. Both the headteacher and the CP coordinator felt that the CP development worker (a member of the local CP partnership team) had contributed both ideas and 'drive' to the programme.

The coordinator described the approach to the programme from the CP team as 'tightly structured' to ensure that the relevant project plans, aims and objectives were in place.

The relationships that the creative providers developed within the school community also contributed to the activities' success. The artists were looked on as 'very much part of the school.' Their willingness to listen to the children and to take on board their ideas aided the sense of the 'ownership' that the children felt of the work. One teacher summarised the artists approach as: "let's get going on this – give us your ideas" rather than giving them all the ideas to start with.' Also, the teachers attributed part of the success of the project 'to the fact that the creative providers had understood the importance of communicating with teachers and explaining to them the objectives of the sessions with children and debriefing them afterwards.

The headteacher also recognised the commitment of the children, commenting that they had embraced CP wholeheartedly. He felt that 'the [good] behaviour and commitment of the children who had been involved in CP activities' had contributed to its success.

What were the main challenges?

The headteacher commented that the playground would 'last for generations', thereby giving children opportunities to develop better social and interpersonal skills, self-confidence and speaking and listening skills. Staff felt that such developments would, in time, spill over into children's academic achievement.

The headteacher felt that as a result of CP, staff had recognised the value that creativity had brought to teaching and learning within the school.

Consequently, he hoped that creativity would become 'embedded in the curriculum' through the teachers' increased understanding of how to enrich the curriculum, and a knowledge of how to tap into the skills of creative providers. Teachers felt that they had already begun teaching through a more 'integrated' and 'holistic' approach, for example by incorporating art, PE and ICT into other curriculum areas.

Since the playground has been completed, the school has appointed a resident artist/broker. Her role has been to work closely with school staff to identify particular curriculum areas that staff feel would benefit from a creative input, including topics that they found 'dry' to teach. Her role also involves identifying and liaising with creative providers, as well as coordinating and facilitating activities herself.

Conclusions

CP activities at Glade Hill Primary School have developed children's self-esteem and emotional well-being and have enhanced their ability to work collaboratively as a team. A creative approach to learning has been nurtured in the school. Children's expectations of themselves have been raised and their enjoyment of school increased. Teachers have developed their own creative skills and their ideas for teaching. In addition to this, a sense of community within the school has been heightened and the profile of the school in its community has been raised. The physical presence of the playground has provided a lasting legacy of CP, and it will enable the school to continue to develop children's learning through play.



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Case Study 2: The Priory School, Slough

This case study is based on 19 interviews. These were conducted with the headteacher, the Creative Partnerships coordinator, 10 teachers – eight of whom were year group coordinators, one was a member of the senior management team (SMT) and early years team leader and one was the head of music. In addition to these school based staff, interviews were also conducted with one parent governor and two creative providers. Group interviews were conducted with four groups of young people from years 1, 2, 5 and 6 (a total of 11 children). The case study visit took place in February 2004 over a period of two days.

The school

The Priory school is a nursery and primary school catering for 744 boys and girls aged three to 11. The school employs 45 full-time and three part-time teachers. Approximately 9% of the children on roll are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average. The percentage of students who have English as an additional language is 19%. This is high when compared to the national average but low compared to the local average of approximately 40%. Young people with special educational needs make up around 15% of the student body and the school has a specialist unit for young people with physical disability.

In October 2002 Ofsted described The Priory as a 'perfect school'.

The school has gained Beacon status in nine specialist areas, including 'Whole school good practice' and 'Raising standards through strategic planning, leadership and management training'. The school was awarded an Arts Council England Artsmark Silver award (it has since been awarded Artsmark Gold) and, prior to the introduction of Creative Partnerships, they ran an annual arts week focusing on visual arts. The Priory School introduced free, timetabled instrumental lessons for all young people in years 3 to 6. In addition, a theatre group worked with the school on an occasional basis.

What did the school set out to achieve?

Despite the excellent reputation and successes of the school, they were continually striving to develop their provision for children. The SMT wanted to make what was already an excellent school a more creative institution that was not solely focused on attainment. They felt the school offered little space for creativity, and the existing way of working was provided little recognition of the natural tendency for children to learn in a cross-curricular way.

The SMT decided to overhaul radically the timetable and delivery of the curriculum. They would continue to teach core subjects (mathematics, English and science) in the morning, when children would be set by ability. In contrast, the afternoon activity would cover the remaining subject areas, using themes stimulated by a work of art. The impact of this approach was that all the elements of the National Curriculum would be covered but that 50% of the timetable would be given over to encouraging creative approaches to teaching and learning. These ideas originated in the school, but Creative Partnerships provided the context and catalyst for many of the activities that took place.

What did the school do?

Before Creative Partnerships came into being, the school had already decided to use works of art as a stimulus for teaching the foundation subjects (namely geography, history, religious education, design and technology, art, music, physical education and citizenship). One member of staff commented that when these changes were first discussed they sounded “brilliant but awesome”. The school was invited to bid for Creative Partnerships involvement by the local partnership. After attending initial briefing meetings, the headteacher felt that Creative Partnerships would be a good opportunity for the school. She felt that the funding would allow the school to work with creative providers, using them ‘more profoundly’ than in the past. This, it was hoped, would enable longer term involvement that could lead to a ‘radical impact on teaching and learning as a whole’. The focus on long-term, whole-school impact was a key feature of this school’s approach to the initiative. Creative Partnerships projects were integral to the new way of teaching the foundation subjects, and all teachers and children have been involved in Creative Partnerships activities.

The school began planning in the autumn term of 2002. During the first term, the funding available from Creative Partnerships was used to enable staff to attend INSET opportunities and to plan the year ahead. During the planning phase, all the teaching staff were given the same brief:

- to choose six works of art from which they could teach the foundation subjects (of these, one was studied by the whole school linked to the National Gallery project ‘Take One Picture’)
- to plan half-termly modules around each work of art, and
- to build in evaluation procedures (these would feed back into the development and evolution of each project/picture and also act as a measure of student performance).

The staff either planned together as a year group or divided the tasks between them, meeting regularly to discuss progress. The curriculum coordinators took responsibility for ensuring the planning addressed the National Curriculum requirements for each subject. The Creative Partnerships coordinator ensured that the projects included years 1 to 6, that there was an emphasis on creativity and that work with creative providers was included as appropriate. The new approach was introduced in January 2003. Once the major planning was completed, Creative Partnerships funds were devoted to bringing creative providers and other specialists into the school. These have included an African dancer, a group of actors and a local visual artist. These individuals and groups have worked with the school in many different ways. For example, the visual artist provided INSET for staff and ran activities for the children.

What has been the impact of Creative Partnerships?

Impact on young people

Many teachers commented on the increase in self-esteem, confidence and self-belief they witnessed in young people. One noted that the impact has been 'profound' as she described how children were showing considerable enthusiasm, having been 'inspired by their learning and what they are doing'. Another felt that the children had 'come alive'. This teacher referred to the way children now approached their work with greater attention to detail and a more sustained interest. The work had affected individuals in different ways. For example, one girl explained how she used to think that her peers were more able than her because they were working at a faster pace. However, since her involvement in a Creative Partnerships project, she found it easier to keep up and felt that other young people considered her to be equally able.

Many members of staff and several young people commented on the impact that involvement in Creative Partnerships activities had had on independent learning. For example, one teacher described a year 6 activity in which the students presented their own project on Spain. They had been given complete control over the creation of this project and had enthusiastically and successfully engaged with independent work. They were also given the freedom to record their learning in different ways. For example, students were encouraged to use conceptual techniques like 'mind maps,' take photographs, and generally record their progress using more imaginative methods.

The staff and young people also spoke of improvements in self-expression amongst the children. One teacher said:

"They have the freedom to express their opinions in a completely different way – it is total freedom now... through arts, drama and performance we are getting their opinions... we didn't have this as much before."

Children felt that the new work had helped with particular aspects of their learning. When we asked a group of children in years 3 and 4 how the new things they had learnt during Creative Partnerships had helped them in their school work, they responded that it helped them remember more and answer questions more quickly. Teachers felt their aim of providing a more coherent learning experience had also been achieved, as one teacher said:

"Things seem to make more sense, because [they] are linked to the picture and it all seems to have more of a point." "[Discussions] are more deep and meaningful than before.' '[The children] make more links between topics now".

Teachers also commented that the scope of learning had widened for children, as they now had the opportunity to learn more about the world. Generally, it was felt that young people were 'more rounded', more enthusiastic and had greater ownership of their work as a result of their involvement in Creative Partnerships.

Impact on teachers

Teachers felt that had helped them to be more motivated and excited by their work. They were no longer prescribing to children what to do, and that this had provided a greater space for self-expression. One teacher said:

“It is amazing how much you can get out of teaching this way it is inspiring.”

Some teachers thought their approaches to teaching and learning had developed as a result of working with creative providers. This had given them confidence to replicate an activity initiated by the creative provider or to adapt the idea for use in another context. As one teacher said:

“New people bring in new ideas. It makes you feel like you can do things better.”

Impact on creative providers

The creative providers spoke of both a personal and professional impact arising from their involvement in Creative Partnerships. They felt it had contributed to a sense of personal achievement. They took pride in the fact that they had helped teachers to grow in confidence and had enabled them to use new materials and activities with their classes. One creative provider commented that Creative Partnerships had allowed her to develop her role as a professional who could ‘enable’ teachers to realise their goals for a particular project. They also talked about achieving professional satisfaction that resulted from being given the opportunity to offer something of value to schools, teachers and especially the children. Another creative provider talked positively about the experience of offering her skills, expertise and teaching experience to bring out the best in both teachers and children.

Whole school impact

Creative Partnerships has enabled the school to provide greater flexibility within the curriculum. The school has achieved its aim of restructuring the timetable and teaching the foundation subjects in a cross-curricular way. This has involved all the staff and young people in the school. In addition, the image and reputation of the school, though already very good, has been enhanced both by a greater number of people coming into the school (including creative providers) and by staff visiting other schools to talk to teachers and others about what they have done. Both the headteacher and the Creative Partnerships coordinator have been involved in disseminating their experience. Though this dissemination activity was connected to the school’s beacon status, Creative Partnerships activity provided a focus for discussion.

Looking back, looking forward: what were the key factors in making it work?

There were a number of key factors identified that helped Creative Partnerships to be successful in The Priory School. These relate to the staff and their approach, the leadership both within and outside the school and the type of support provided during the planning of activities. The staff felt that teamwork had been very important and that all teachers were seen to be supportive of the development associated with the project. Their involvement in planning had resulted in a strong feeling of ownership. Staff valued the autonomy they were given over who they worked with and how they worked, for example teachers were able to select their creative providers. As one teacher noted: “People choose [Creative] partners... [there was] no imposition”.

They were also able to work in a collaborative way with creative providers, enabling activity to be developed through dialogue between both parties. As a result, the activities met the specific requirements of the teachers and the needs of the children. This was felt to be positive as it gave the teachers a real sense of ownership over the activity, and partnership with the creative providers. Strong leadership within both the school and Creative Partnerships was highlighted as a key factor for success. The need for a good Creative Partnerships coordinator within the school was said to be crucial, and the partnership leadership support was equally important. As one teacher said:

“Slough [Creative Partnerships] has been brilliant... they are so keen and enthusiastic and they are always [available] on the end of a phone.”

Teachers also highlighted the importance of the Creative Partnerships-funded INSET. This had acted as a catalyst to stimulate creativity and formed the foundations upon which the activity was planned. It had also allowed them to understand more fully what the headteacher and SMT were striving to achieve and enabled them to see how they might realise these goals.

What were the main challenges?

Although all the accounts from staff were extremely positive, they also mentioned some of the more challenging aspects they had encountered. They commented on the intense workloads that had accompanied Creative Partnerships activity, both during the initial planning stages and also in the cycle of reflection and review built into the projects. There were mixed views about this: teachers found the planning and reflection stimulating, but they were frustrated by the fact that there was not enough time to do everything they wanted to do. A small number of teachers thought that the planning requirements had been overly burdensome at the start of the projects. Some felt this was not a good use of time as they often revisited plans and changed them once the projects had begun and they had gained a better understanding of the new approach in question. However, teachers noted the importance of the need for planning.

What is the legacy of Creative Partnerships?

All those we spoke to (including teachers, young people and creative providers) were very positive about the legacy of Creative Partnerships. They all remained committed to the developments that had been made. In addition it is evident that development was ongoing. Even though the activities were already highly successful, there was a desire to continue to evaluate and refine projects. However, staff were concerned about the sustainability of without the guarantee of continued funding at the level that it currently enjoyed. Some members of staff held the opinion that the school would find new funding to allow them to continue in much the same way. Others felt they would manage with fewer visiting creative providers (or none at all) as teachers would use the experience they had gained to provide a range of creative activities themselves. One teacher commented that this approach would be acceptable as “You could still do things, but a visitor has a much bigger impact.” This suggests that Creative Partnerships would have a legacy but that this would be diminished if funding did not become available to sustain activity at current levels.

Conclusions

The Priory School presents a positive example of the impact of Creative Partnerships. The initiative has provided structure, support and guidance, all of which have helped this high performing school to achieve its goals. By adopting a whole-school approach, the school has radically changed the teaching of foundation subjects. This has increased the school’s creative capacity and made the teaching and learning more cross-curricular to the benefit of children and staff.





Case Study 3: Deansfield High School, Black Country

Deansfield High School is located in an economically deprived area of the Black Country. The school joined the Black Country Creative Partnership in 2002, and since then has been cited as a best practice example of creative and partnership working by the Times Educational Supplement (TES). At the time of the case study visit in January 2004 the school was engaged in a number of different projects across all age ranges. A total of 11 interviews were conducted for the case study: with an assistant headteacher, who shared the responsibility of Creative Partnerships coordination with another teacher; three subject teachers; the vice-chair of governors; one creative provider (who acted as a facilitator for the school) and three groups of young people from years 7 to 13 (16 young people in all).

The school

Deansfield is a small school and, at the time of the last inspection (2001) there were 554 young people aged between 11 and 16 on roll. It is located in an area of extreme economic disadvantage and deprivation, which is reflected in a high proportion (40%) of young people who are eligible for free school meals. Deansfield was placed in special measures in 1997 but an inspection conducted in 1999 judged that sufficient improvement had been made and the school came out of special measures at that time. Since then, Deansfield has improved the standards of attainment 'quite significantly', especially at GCSE where the rate of improvement has been 'much faster than in schools nationally' and the gap between Deansfield and other schools has 'narrowed substantially' (Ofsted 2001).

What did the school set out to achieve?

The assistant headteacher explained that the school set out to develop and enhance their existing priorities. These priorities were twofold, firstly to enhance teachers' professional development, especially in relation to adopting a wider range of teaching and learning styles and secondly, to raise young people's self esteem, and confidence and broaden their experiences of culture. The school's arts policy, which was written as a result of Deansfield's participation in Creative Partnerships, states that arts activities will be enhanced which will aid 'innovative and imaginative contexts for teaching and learning in all curriculum areas... [and] increase the energy and enthusiasm of young people and of teachers'. This aim of enthusing young people was identified by one of the school governors who viewed Creative Partnerships as a key way to reach the school's more 'challenging' young people, in particular 'those who are more difficult to involve in education'.

What did the school do?

At the time of the case study visit, Deansfield had completed two Creative Partnerships projects: a film project in collaboration with Wolverhampton University students, and another entitled The Atlantis project. A third project was just beginning on regeneration and town planning. As The Atlantis project was the largest completed one at the school at the time of the case study visit, it formed the focus for discussion with the interviewees and will be the main subject of this report.

The Atlantis project was named after the Atlantis Nightclub in Wolverhampton. The idea for the project and much of its development was guided by the young people, who were also represented on the project's steering group. Young people were asked what they thought creative industries were. This led to the theme of a nightclub, including a fashion show and opportunities for young people to showcase their creative talents. Following the young people's initial idea, the school staff had a half day INSET event at the nightclub to 'brainstorm', plan fieldtrips and identify curricular opportunities.

The aims of the Atlantis Project were to develop young people's abilities and talents within a creative context that was relevant to their lives, and to widen their experiences of opportunities for employment within the creative sector. The project provided opportunities to:

- engage in a cross curricular projects
- develop creativity
- give young people the chance to apply their imagination
- pursue a purpose and evaluate their ideas within the context of night club culture.

The project set out to involve all young people in the school and in so doing, to develop a sense of community, working collaboratively with creative providers and groups. The project ran across the whole curriculum, linking performing arts, citizenship, geography, design and technology, science, literacy, numeracy, French and business studies with creative industries and the wider community.

Nine hundred young people and staff from Deansfield took over the nightclub for one night in May 2003, following six months of preparation that included creative writing, learning about the properties of light and how to programme lighting on computers, and making statistical records of drink sales. A plethora of creative providers were involved including a milliner, a potter, a story teller, a French theatre company, First Leisure Nightclubs, Dance Exchange, Punch Records, Arena Theatre and Loudmouth Theatre Company. Additional sponsors and partners included Wolverhampton Community Safety Partnership and J. Sainsbury.

On the night, young people from all year groups put on dance, music and fashion shows, operated the sound and lighting systems, ran a French café (where only French was spoken), practiced orienteering skills around the club and managed the crowd. A group of Year 11 young people also worked with the local Community Safety Partnership to produce a pocket size Safe Night Out Guide (SNOG), giving advice on health and safety, drugs awareness and the role of the police.

What has been the impact of Creative Partnerships?

Impact on young people

All those spoken to identified definite and wide ranging impacts on the young people. Impacts were felt across the school, including increased academic ability and personal skills, broadened horizons, improved relationships between school staff and young people and improved attendance and behaviour. All the young people spoken to clearly enjoyed the Atlantis Project and also felt that they had learned a lot from it. Areas which young people felt had been developed ranged from new creative skills such as writing lyrics and music production using ICT, to new personal skills such as organisation, communication, collaboration and confidence in front of large crowds. They also identified an impact on their academic achievement, particularly in French and said that they had a better understanding of different types of learning. As the project was integrated into the curriculum, some young people also felt aided in their GCSE and A level studies. One young person suggested that she had got a good grade in her textile exam due to the project, while another commented that it 'egged me on to do better in my GCSEs'. These new skills were also recognised by the school staff. One teacher gave an example:

"I've been working with 6th formers doing their UCAS forms and many of them mention Creative Partnerships in their personal statements. That in itself says it all about the skills that the children have learned and what it means to them."

The young people felt that the project had broadened their horizons; they now had a greater understanding of the opportunities offered by the creative industries:

"It opened their eyes to the reality that the creative arts are not simply enjoyable for themselves, you can be employed to do it."
(vice-chair of Deansfield governors)

The teachers felt that this was aided by the role models provided by the creative provider, in particular for the boys. The project also made the young people feel differently about attending school and their relationship with the teachers. They valued working with their teachers outside of the formal school setting, as a 6th form student explained:

"They [the teachers] were different outside school which I think helped the young people/teacher relationship as they could see that teachers are actually human!"

Staff, young people and governors all identified an impact on attendance. One of the young people said that "it makes you want to come to school" whilst a teacher gave the example of one young person whose attendance was 'incredibly erratic' before Creative Partnerships, but "now comes back on a Wednesday night for extra work". As a result, the teacher said that this young person's grades were improving, and he had decided to go on to study design at A level. Creative Partnerships, said the teacher, "was the turning point for him".

The school staff identified an impact on the young peoples' behaviour. One teacher said:

"I haven't seen more motivated classes – it gives them a boost to do something that no one else is doing; they're in charge. Because they are more motivated they are more inclined not to misbehave".

This was also noted by guests who attended The Atlantis. The vice-chair of governors, and head teacher at a local (non-Creative Partnerships) school said that not only was behaviour good on the night of the nightclub event, but also in the subsequent term. He admitted that "you can't make a direct link, but clearly it helped the school move forward in changing social relationships".

Impact on teachers

All the school staff interviewed said that Creative Partnerships had had a significant impact on them. The teachers said that they now had a better understanding of other curriculum subjects, and therefore a better relationship with colleagues from other departments. They also said that they felt more motivated, valued and rewarded. The assistant head teacher felt that this had a positive effect on staff recruitment and retention, attributing much of the school's improved reputation to the 'enrichment' provided by Creative Partnerships.

Impact on creative providers

All the creative providers were impressed with what Deansfield achieved from the Atlantis project, and praised the positive relationships the school had forged with the local creative sector. For some of the creative providers, this was their first time working with a school and they felt that they learned a lot from the new experience. One teacher explained:

"The [creative provider] worked in adult education and she looked terrified to start with, but in the end she said that she had learned from a different angle".

Both teachers and creative providers felt they had an equal working relationship, as one teacher put it:

"We all worked together, the young people, myself and the creative provider... I think they [the creative provider] enjoyed it as much as we did".

Whole school impact

The impact on the whole school is where the success of the Atlantis project was demonstrated. Everyone interviewed, from the youngest student to the longest-serving member of staff, told us about how the atmosphere of the school had changed and how this had made a positive impact both within the school and beyond. The improved relationship between young people and teachers, and between teachers working in different departments created what the assistant headteacher termed 'a buzz about the school... an incredible feeling of community'. The young people felt this too, commenting that 'it showed that the teachers really want to help the school'.

This enthusiasm reached into the local community. The school was previously struggling to throw off the stigma commonly attached to a school that has been in special measures, but now the activities taking place in school are being widely cited as an example of best practice and reported in the TES. This enthusiasm has also led to a sustained feeling of pride in the school from young people, staff and the local community. One 6th form student said:

"People think it's a better school now. It's got to be one of the best schools around here now, it's drastically changed. Creative Partnerships has given the school a new life."

The vice-chair of governors said:

"It gave a sense of identity and pride to the whole school in a way that I've never seen another project do in any school... Self esteem is probably one of the most significant things, it developed in a whole range of people; not just the individual child but the whole school. You could sense it in the staff, a sense of pride in the school."

Looking back, looking forwards: what were the key factors in making it work?

The planning of the Atlantis project was crucial to its success. The involvement and enthusiasm of all key groups; young people, staff, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and creative providers right from the start meant that all involved felt they had ownership of the project. This has also meant that there was what the creative provider termed 'a genuine partnership':

"It's transparent, it's joined up... it's a partnership. It is not going in and providing cover. It is not doing the job for the school or for the kids or for the teachers. It's got to be negotiated right from the start that the school is putting in as much as you are, preferably a lot more."

The support of the SLT throughout the project and the willingness and flexibility of a significant number of school staff were identified by the assistant head teacher as being main factors in making Creative Partnerships work in the school. She explained that the staff have to 'put in extra time, extra effort and be willing to work in different ways'. This was echoed by the staff themselves. The support and flexibility of school staff and managers was also identified by the schools' Creative Friend, a film maker who acted as a broker on behalf of the school. He told us that 'schools that have got the most out of... [Creative Partnerships] have demonstrated that flexibility'.

What were the main challenges?

There were some initial concerns raised by the Creative Partnerships coordinators and the Creative Friend over the bureaucracy surrounding the financing of the project, however this was felt by all parties to have been resolved. Some of the teachers also felt that time and staffing constraints caused difficulties. When asked how these constraints could be overcome, the staff suggested working during school holidays or weekends.

What is the legacy of Creative Partnerships?

Many of the interviewees spoke of the positive legacy that Creative Partnerships will have in the school, from the raised self-esteem of the school community to the increased respect from the local community. The partnerships formed with creative providers, and with the local community, will continue to be important for the school. As the vice-chair of governors explained 'the notion of partnership is key now in the school'. The school is looking to forge more partnerships with businesses, other schools, colleges and universities, and the wider community. The sustainability of this change was identified by the vice-chair of governors: 'because it's about practice and ethos, it's not so affected by budget'.

Conclusions

Creative Partnerships has helped to make Deansfield High School an exciting place to work, for both staff and young people. The personal and educational impact of the project on all key groups has raised self esteem and morale both within the school and beyond.

Photography Credits

- Pg 2 Creative Partnerships Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham (BDR):
Daring Discoveries Research Project. Photographer: Gavin Joynt.
- Pg 10 Creative Partnerships Bradford: Take One Picture.
Photographer: Tim Smith.
- Pg 17 Creative Partnerships Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham (BDR):
Daring Discoveries Research Project. Photographer: Gavin Joynt.
- Pg 18 Creative Partnerships Bradford: Playground of the Imagination.
Photographer: Amanda Crowther.

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Charity registration no 1036733

You can get this publication in Braille, in large print, on audio CD and in electronic formats. Please contact us if you need any of these formats.

Printed by Beacon Press.

Design by www.luminous.co.uk

© Arts Council England, February 2007

ISBN number

0-7287-1320-9

978-0-7287-1320-8