

A.N.D

A new direction for arts,
culture and young london

CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON

SIX STORIES OF CREATIVITY AND PARTNERSHIP

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

SARAH B DAVIES

CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON COLUMBIA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Columbia Primary School is a large urban school in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets serving a mixed community that is diverse in its cultural heritage and ethnicity. Ofsted rated the school as good with an outstanding curriculum in 2009.

It was involved in the Creative Partnerships programme from the pilot phase in 2002 to 2011. In 2008 the school was awarded School of Creativity status for its capacity to provide innovative leadership and support to schools. Since the end of the Creative Partnerships programme in 2011, the school has continued to maintain partnerships with creative professionals and is committed to integrating creativity across the curriculum.

The current headteacher, Mary Igoe, previous head teacher Penny Bentley (in post from 1986 to 2006), and the teacher in charge of Creative Teaching and Learning, Philippa Jordan, tell the story of Columbia Primary School's Creative Partnerships experience and its progression since.



PRINTING

Photo by Philippa
Jordan. Image
courtesy of Columbia
Primary School

About the school prior to Creative Partnerships

Previous to our involvement in Creative Partnerships in 2002, the school had become dissatisfied with the curriculum as it was. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were prescriptive and that didn't suit us – it wasn't very 'Columbia'. As a school we were doing well, but our priority was to raise standards and we were ready to look at a different way of curriculum delivery and planning. We were already establishing links with local arts organisations and galleries, and artists had worked in the school for a long time, including artists in residence. We also initiated whole school collaborative projects around a theme or a book, which would lead to exhibitions each year. However, while this work was enriching, it hadn't quite pervaded the curriculum and there was still work to be done. The strategy frameworks, with their literacy and numeracy hours, were a move away from this; enrichment of the curriculum seemed to have slipped and it was time for us to reassess. Creative Partnerships looked as though it would help take the school in the direction it wanted to go in by helping us to access necessary funds, linking us with a community of creative professionals and involving us within a wider creative network.

At the beginning we were experimental: we thought of Creative Partnerships as annual 'projects' which were a lot of hard work and then they were over. It took time for us to realise creativity was something to disseminate across the curriculum, not a one-off project. This realisation led to work incorporating IT, poetry and film which pervaded the curriculum and really enhanced teaching and learning. Eventually the school was encouraged to apply to become a School of Creativity. We already had Artsmark Gold and therefore we were used to this sort of evaluative process. We achieved School of Creativity status in 2008 and were delighted to be recognised in this way.

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BAT INFORMATION BOOK
Photo by Philippa Jordan. Image courtesy of Columbia Primary School



CHEFS, SCREEN SHOT
Image courtesy of Columbia Primary School

Projects and Partnerships

The School of Creativity programme worked very well within the school. It helped us to become reflective in our practice, facilitated excellent learning and enabled us to work with our local authority, the Schools of Creativity groups and within wider agendas such as Find Your Talent. We had hoped the School of Creativity group would become a forum for sharing creative teaching and learning practices with other schools outside the group, but we found our designation separated us from schools within the Change and Enquiry School programmes and this co-operative work did not happen so much.

Columbia continued to develop its creative practices through our own projects in an innovative way. A Creative Agent supported our project work and a Schools of Creativity Consultant worked with us to provide the sort of advice and overview that our regional Creative Partnerships team, London East, had provided in previous years – but from a national agenda rather than a local one.

Using film for teaching and learning became an integrated part of our curriculum. We began with a project called Splash using poetry, film and animation and then as technology changed, more possibilities opened up; children and teachers could film footage in class and download the film to our school computers and we learned to edit films ourselves. We also realised we didn't need to be concerned with creating polished pieces of work but instead we could create useful films that teachers could use in their classroom on a day to day basis. **Film became an ongoing, integrated and sustainable method for reflection, assessment and creative learning.** Parents, teachers and other schools can now log into our Vimeo account to view and use these films.

Change and Impact

The school's priority was to raise standards, and Creative Partnerships definitely supported this. **We believe that if children's minds are engaged in creative thinking then standards are raised in literacy and numeracy.** The programme balanced the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and allowed teachers to become more adventurous and experimental. Creative Partnerships has given us a good basis to build upon and the work continues. We have an increased understanding of the focus, reflection, different ideas and different approach that an external professional can bring. As a school we learned that a partnership works extremely well when the practitioners fit in with the organisation of a school; making proper arrangements and understanding teachers' timetables and other commitments. One arts organisation in particular, D fie foe, understood the school and the value of creative learning well; they added value by bringing their expertise in a creative field to complement the curriculum. Staff learned technical skills and abilities in film and animation and learned to be more daring, taking risks and trying out new things and allowing children to try things out too. Through our link with Creative Partnerships there has been a greater understanding of creativity, year on year; it is empowering for teachers. People at Columbia now understand creativity; they know it is not merely about painting, but more about thinking skills. Last year the school developed a thinking skills curriculum and progression plan – a working document that has come from a greater understanding year on year, through Creative Partnerships about creativity. Creativity is now one of our school values, represented by an icon of a light bulb.

It is difficult to directly attribute attainment to our creative approach of curriculum delivery – we take a mixed intake from the local community and our attainment is just above average – **but we have evaluative evidence that our creative curriculum is a factor in good learning.** We take a broad range of evidence into account when measuring success, including skills, confidence, motivation, co-operation, as well as progress and attainment. We believe our approach results in well-rounded children who are prepared for secondary school. The children think in a different way too; they are enthused and they take control of their own learning. This is reflected in the feedback we get from the parents who comment on the great journey their children have been on.

We have learned a great deal about the processes of creative learning and partnership working. We know the benefits of a ‘hook’ to interest children in their learning, for example we have put core books into classes and asked teachers to use this as a starting point for learning. That has made an exciting shift in the delivery of the curriculum.

Creative Partnerships also developed our knowledge and capacity to raise funds and we are developing new bids now to be able to continue working with external creative professionals as we go forward. Each creative practitioner has brought something new to the school and they have learned a great deal about developing their education skills as well. We also have continuing relationships with many of our partners, but while the practitioners may be the same we push for innovative new work each year. We never do the same project twice; always refreshing things. Both the partners (the school and creative practitioners) are constantly changing, reshaping and evaluating what is being delivered each year.

Looking forward

Mary Igoe, Penny Bentley and Philippa Jordan were asked to use their 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:

- commitment from the Senior Leadership Team
- planning proformas which include creative practices, such as thinking skills and embedding film
- a designated person in charge of creative teaching and learning and a person in charge of enrichment to raise the profile of these areas in the school
- developing an ethos that values creativity;
- developing a staff ethos of sharing and working together, co-operation not competition
- on-going reflection and evaluation of what works well.

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Recommendations and suggestions to schools seeking out new creative partnerships:

- aim to create a rich and creative curriculum, including plenty of extra-curricular opportunities and trips outside the school
- think about creative thinking skills, rather than activities, when planning the curriculum.
- make partnerships with arts, music and other organisations
- draw in creative practitioners to the school;
- develop partnerships that allow you to think about on-going learning rather than one-off activities
- explore creative practice in your CPD programme – don't expect all staff to get it without a lot of input
- look at your data and what it is telling you is needed to allow all pupils to progress and improve
- look to your community – parents, arts organisations, businesses, guilds, museums, galleries
- use school networks – geographical networks of schools and like minded schools;
- be a bit subversive and hold your nerve if you know it makes sense
- allocate some budget to creativity and explore the potential for co-fundraising opportunities.

School links and project examples

www.columbia.towerhamlets.sch.uk

Vimeo site

www.vimeo.com/columbiaschool

Spotlight on Columbia project, 2005

www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/spotlight-on-columbia



CHECKING THE SHOT

Photo by Loraine Leeson 2010. Image courtesy of Columbia Primary School



FILMMAKER

Photo by Philippa Jordan. Image courtesy of Columbia Primary 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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