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CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON

SIX STORIES OF CREATIVITY AND PARTNERSHIP

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CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON LAURISTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Lauriston Primary School is an inner-city school with a nursery in the London Borough of Hackney. It serves a culturally and socially diverse community and aims to provide a warm, happy and stimulating environment.

The school was involved in the Creative Partnerships programme from 2002 to 2011. In 2008 it was awarded School of Creativity status for its capacity to provide innovative leadership and support to schools. Since the end of Creative Partnerships in 2011 the school has continued its commitment to investing in further creative opportunities and collaborations for the benefit of pupils and staff.

Peter Sanders, Deputy Headteacher from 1995 to 2012, tells the story of Lauriston Primary School's Creative Partnerships experience and its progression since.



IMAGES

All photographs by
Peter Sanders. Image
courtesy of Lauriston
Primary School

About the school prior to Creative Partnerships

Lauriston Primary School was initially advised to apply for Creative Partnerships by our Local Authority which was already aware of our strong commitment to the arts as a way of enriching the offer to children. At the time of applying we were somewhat disillusioned by the offer being made by several existing arts providers. They tended to come in to school, do something great but short-term, then leave, taking their expertise with them. No one in school felt confident that they could emulate or modify the creative practice they had seen. The idea of creating partnerships with artists, that would act as a kind of CPD and move our thinking on as a school was very attractive. With the funding available, we knew we could get some really high quality artists who would make us question our own practice and become more adventurous in our way of working. We also thought that as a school we had quite a lot to offer the arts partners too, and would bring something positive to their experience.

Projects and Partnerships

A genuine commitment to working creatively can be a challenge to a school in terms of teacher confidence, timetabling, available space and demands made by new national initiatives. Initially, we were not sure how to proceed with this new type of programme and were a bit tentative in getting started. However, securing appropriate partners for our school and for our current needs was brilliant. Guidance from our regional Creative Partnerships office (Creative Partnerships London East) who understood schools, how they worked, and their needs and constraints was very helpful.

Each of our projects have worked and for different reasons. For example, 'Talk and Textiles' with storyteller, Ben Haggarty and artist Rachel Howard was the first and most wide-ranging project. Everyone in the school became part of it and the whole-school community was positively affected. It involved parents and children who had never previously seen school as a place where they had a voice or a part to play.

Another project, 'Ghost School' worked well because the partners (artist Sue Ridge, architect Julia Dwyer and poet 'Shedman' John Davies) understood how children think and allowed them free reign with their ideas. The end product was a genuine and original collaboration between artists, teachers and children.

Most recently, as a School of Creativity we partnered with Jubilee Primary School on increasing parental involvement in the role creative arts has in schools in a project called Arts Beyond the Classroom. This took the form of several workshops and visits to cultural venues with parents and children outside school hours. In the last year of the project we had an artist working alongside parents and children in the nursery, catching them at the very beginning of their school experience. **Both projects were very successful in opening the workings of our school and showing the value of creative ways of working to parents** (many of whom were initially reluctant to become involved with their children's school lives) and changed many people's mindsets.

Change and Impact

Now that funding streams have ended (in many cases) it could mean that creative initiatives cease in schools. However, Lauriston Primary School is committed to identifying elements of the budget to enable creative partnerships to continue. Staff are now very much more aware of the benefits of such initiatives and want to see them continue in the future.

What is most striking is that the school looks different; display has become much more purposeful and often genuinely interactive. Staff and children are immensely open to new and untested ways of working and are not afraid to take risks. They now behave differently. They see questioning, risk-taking and experimentation as the norm.

We have learnt that there are several different ways of approaching learning and that they all have value. It has been fantastic working with artists from different disciplines who are not constrained by the 'grammar of education'. They don't assume that a response to something needs to be written, that a display needs to be confined to the regulation display boards, that a piece of work has to fit into the timescale of a school morning and so on.

When people come into our school they see happy, motivated children working alongside their teachers with the aim of creating exciting outcomes. **This runs alongside attainment; in our experience, children who work well together, who are constructive and inquisitive, working with purpose and confidence also achieve well in the statutory elements of the curriculum. There are exceptions and dips and it is important** to stick by what you believe rather than be led by knee-jerk reactions prompted by the prevailing political zeitgeist.

Looking forward

Peter Sanders was asked to use his 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 everyone to making creative programmes work, starting with the headteacher
- looking for opportunities beyond the obvious arts subjects to use creative teaching
- leadership must be 100% committed. This means having creativity on the agenda at governors meetings and as part of the CPD provision for staff in the school year
- flexibility. Trying out new things in new ways and in new spaces. Flexibility of groupings to allow for a variety of sizes working together
- communication. Making sure that everyone knows why it is seen as important by leadership and everyone is kept on board by being informed about what the school is doing/intends to do. Celebrating what is being done through performance/exhibition etc.

Recommendations and suggestions to schools seeking out new creative partnerships:

- projects do not need to be large scale or expensive: lack of money is a definite barrier, since budgets are tightening all the time. At Lauriston we realised it would be possible to replicate much of what we did at no cost and most of the projects could be scaled down
- the most effective projects were always ones which parents, children and staff had a stake in, and which really meant something to them (their own stories/experiences)
- gain awareness of untapped resources within the school community. This might involve rearranging timetables to get staff working collaboratively, sharing expertise and taking risks.

School links and project examples

www.lauriston.hackney.sch.uk

Arts Beyond the Classroom project
www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/arts-beyond-the-classroom

Talk to Text project
www.anewdirection.org.uk/_ajax/call/asset/get_asset/277/0/0/0/0/0/1

Everyone in the school became part of it and the whole-school community was positively affected.



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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