

A New Direction Schools Forum: Effective Partnership Working

East Room, Tate Modern
7 February 2013

Context

On 7 February 2013, 35 teachers and Local Authority representatives came together with 14 arts and cultural organisations at Tate Modern to discuss effective partnership working between schools and the arts/ cultural sector.

Initial presentations from Tate, Sadler's Wells, Apples and Snakes, and the Roundhouse with Haverstock School (Camden) outlined organisations' approaches to partnership working and shared good practice. This was followed by a series of group discussions focussing on six themes identified through A New Direction's recent research into the outcomes of the Creative Partnerships programme, which ended in 2011.

This resource summarise key ideas from schools and arts/ cultural organisations from a series of discussions around each theme.

1. Benefits of Partnership Working

Participants identified benefits to students, staff, the school and to arts/ cultural organisations.

Students

Inspiration.

Engagement: trying new things, enhancing learning, developing new passions.

Exploration: connecting with new organisations, experiencing new places.

Confidence building: identifying talents, building skills, increasing curiosity and confidence to visit cultural/heritage settings.

Qualifications: eg Arts Award.

Staff

Professional development: learning from the partner organisation through co-delivery or INSET.

Confidence building: through developing/ increasing skills and knowledge.

Challenging ideas: working differently with students and seeing them in a different light.

Project legacy: through staff development, knowledge and skills are retained in school and contribute to future work (with or without a partner organisation).

School

Exploring issues, instigating change: partnerships can support areas of the School Development Plan or School Improvement Plan.

Improving performance and results: through engagement and enjoyment.

Family engagement: new opportunities to involve families with school/ learning.

Access to external professionals – artists/ performers/ musicians etc.

Organisations

Thinking differently: about practice and/or collections.

Learning from staff and students.
Reaching/ building new audiences.

The discussion also raised areas of mutual benefit: such as the sharing of skills between school and organisations, and pooling resources.

Questions raised

What makes a partnership successful?
How do schools find the right partner?

2. Establishing project goals

Best practice and recommendations:

Partnerships can be used to support school aims rather than being a 'bolt on'; make your partnership integral to school development and change.
Establish project goals based on need - refer to the School Development Plan/ School Improvement Plan/ vision or broader goals, to help identify a project goal that supports these.
Be realistic (but ambitious!)
Develop shared goals for the project – a partnership shouldn't be one sided.
Evaluate throughout, and tweak your plans if necessary.
Communication is crucial to ensure that goals are clearly understood by all partners from the outset: avoids potential problems later on.

Questions raised:

How do we identify the need that a partnership/project should address? Whose need?
Can one partnership address different 'levels' of goal? Can 'smaller'/ short term goals sit alongside 'larger'/ longer term goals?

3. Selecting Creative Practitioners

Best practice and recommendations:

Identify needs and priorities as a way of focussing ideas and identify what the school wants to get out of a partnership.
Be clear about expectations and budget, and what you are aiming to achieve through partnership.
Try to meet with more than one possible partner to discuss the work, and choose the right partner for your school.
Involve students in the selection process if possible.
Look at working with local organisations, which are likely to have a good understanding of/links with the local community, and may have greater capacity than the national organisations.

Questions raised:

How can students be involved in the selection process for a partnership?
How can schools navigate the wide range of arts and cultural organisations to find a partner?
Where can schools find information about what is available?

4. Developing the project idea

Best practice and recommendations:

Have a clear brief for the partner organisation, setting out what the school hopes to achieve.
Don't be afraid to ask an organisation to tailor their existing offer to help meet school needs.
Be prepared to share resources – eg space and equipment.

Allow time for the idea to develop, and be ready to adapt as the partnership progresses if necessary. Involve students in developing the partnership (beyond just being participants): encourage them to have ownership of the project and take control of their own creativity. Share work with peers and families.

Questions raised:

How can students be involved in developing the project idea in a meaningful way?
How flexible should we be about changing the idea as the project evolves?
What does success look like?

5. Nurturing the partnership

Best practice and recommendations:

Good communication is key throughout the partnership and is everyone's responsibility: ensuring that the work meets the goals agreed.
A dedicated point of contact/ coordinator in school can be helpful, but it is also important to embed partnership work throughout the school to maximise impact.
Senior management support is essential: ensuring that staff have time and 'permission' to work on the project and ensure it is valued across the school.
Consult with students for their feedback on the project: and take their feedback on board.

Questions raised:

How do schools monitor and evaluate the impact of a partnership?
What impact does a partnership have on the future activity of the school?

6. Ensuring the sustainability of creative achievement (legacy)

Best practice and recommendations:

Partnership resources (ideas, knowledge, approaches) can be used beyond the initial project. Maximise staff development potential through the partnership – leaving staff with new skills, techniques, etc that can impact on future work. Disseminate the learning through staff meetings/ INSET etc so that learning remains embedded in the school.
Older students as role models/ advocates can lead to ideas being picked up by younger students and widening the impact of the project.

Questions raised:

Could the London Curriculum (place-based learning) be an opportunity to share good practice, resources and ideas? Sharing ideas with schools across London.
Can Local Authorities support with case studies, suggestions for partners etc?