

# CASE STUDY

Staff Development and Learning

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# Foreword

**Creative Partnerships began in 2002, as a way of bringing together schools and practitioners from a wide range of creative backgrounds to collaborate on innovative projects for children and young people.**

**As the delivery agency for Creative Partnerships in London, A New Direction has seen thousands of young Londoners develop their creative skills, and engage in their learning in new and exciting ways through taking part in the programme.**

**As Creative Partnerships comes to a close, and A New Direction gears up to take on a new and strategic role for children and young people and the arts in London, we present this set of Case Studies to celebrate the programme, exploring the themes of: creativity and change (looking at whole-school change), co-construction of learning, staff development and learning, creative teaching and learning, and outcomes for the 21st century (looking at outcomes for young people).**

**A New Direction would like to thank all of the students, teachers, school staff, practitioners, and Creative Agents who have given so much to the programme.**

**Congratulations on all you have achieved.**

**Steve Moffitt, Director**

# Introduction

The recent schools White Paper: *The Importance of Teaching* identified the need for more active and collaborative modes of staff development,

‘We know that teachers learn best from other professionals and that an ‘open classroom’ culture is vital: observing teaching and being observed, having the opportunity to plan, prepare, reflect and teach with other teachers.’

Creative Partnerships places high value on staff development and facilitates the exploration and development of effective practice. This case study explores how the Change Schools programme has supported staff development and learning at one secondary and two primary schools. The study is based on project observation and interviews undertaken with senior leaders and Creative Partnerships Coordinators in spring 2011. Additional evidence is drawn from project documentation completed by the schools’ Coordinators and Creative Agents.<sup>1</sup> The study focuses on projects undertaken in the final year of the programme.

# 3 schools x 3 years

## Forest Hill School, Lewisham

Forest Hill School is a comprehensive boys' secondary school with a population of over 1300 students from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Forest Hill is a specialist Performing Arts school and was judged by Ofsted in 2007 as 'good with outstanding features.' The quality of teaching was judged to be good but inspectors noted that 'Where teaching is not as good, lessons are over-directed by the teacher, which results in some pupils being passive, and insufficiently involved in their learning.'

Senior leaders at Forest Hill embraced the need to increase active learning and this informed a clear three-year vision for the Change Schools programme. The first year's project focused on Assessment for Learning and deep questioning; the second year focussed on the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) framework. Projects in both years were positively evaluated by participants but only involved small numbers of students and teachers.

'If you want to influence and change young people's experience of school; it has to be about the everyday.' (Coordinator)

The question arose of how to embed creative teaching and learning into the fabric of the school when teachers have limited time to plan, think or reflect on practice. A solution was found when the Coordinator joined forces with the school's Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for teaching and learning. They recognised a convergence of interest in developing active and independent learning for students through a strategic programme of professional development for staff. Endorsed by the Senior Leadership Team, the project utilised the bulk of the year's Inset time (full days and twilight; 12 sessions in all) thus locating the project within teachers' directed time.

**Enquiry: How can we create a culture in the school where staff habitually talk about creativity and doing things differently?**

There was continuity of lead practitioners throughout the three years with additional expertise introduced as appropriate.

reflect on their learning. Within the community, teachers formed trios (across departments) to plan and deliver learning experiments with their students.

The enquiry linked to two of the school's four objectives for the year:

- To ensure the consistent delivery of active learning across subject areas and all key stages.
- To develop an irresistible curriculum that engages and enthuses all students at Key Stage 3.

All 90 teachers (including senior leaders) joined one of six 'learning communities', each with a particular creative learning focus:

- Thinking: Problem solving, developing thinking skills.
- Student led-curriculum: more student control over content and outcomes.
- Being daring: trying new things, risk-taking, not knowing, making mistakes.
- Cross fertilisation: project work across subjects.
- Play: trial and error, experimenting, enjoying discovery.
- Pleasure, enjoyment, beauty: being curious, following a fascination or desire.



Each learning community was facilitated by a creative practitioner and two learning coordinators<sup>2</sup> and provided a space for teachers to get support with and share ideas, feedback on progress and

## Arnhem Wharf Primary School, Tower Hamlets

Arnhem Wharf is a large primary school on the Isle of Dogs. A large majority of pupils come from Bangladeshi backgrounds and many other ethnicities are represented in smaller numbers.

The first year of the Change Schools programme coincided with the school's decision to develop a creative curriculum. The school formed a partnership with Trinity Laban in the first year which was maintained throughout the programme. During the first two years, topics were explored through dance, film and music. In the second year, practitioners worked with Year 6 and the outcomes were seen to be 'astonishingly professional.' At the end of the second year however, the two participating Year 6 teachers successfully applied for more senior posts and left the school. The school had effectively lost two of its principle advocates and internal agents of change.

In 2010, Ofsted reported the school as 'good and rapidly improving' (Ofsted had judged the school as 'satisfactory with good features' in 2006). Ofsted also noted,

'Pupils benefit greatly from links with Creative Partnerships, Trinity College of Music and the Laban Dance Studio, for instance, which help them to develop confidence and self-esteem as well as their individual skills and talents.'

The Deputy Head at Arnhem Wharf articulated the next stage of the school's improvement,

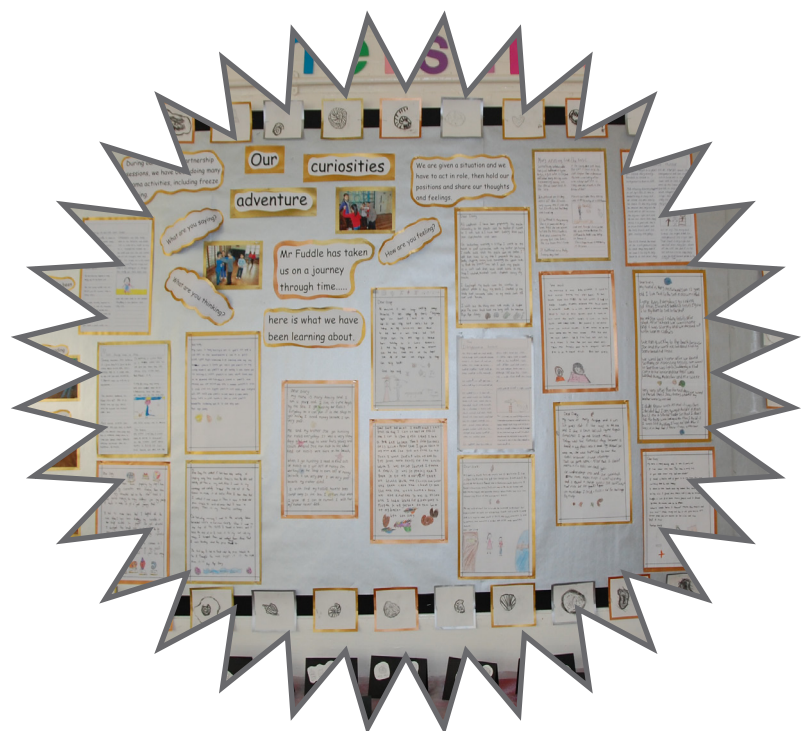
'To be outstanding, Ofsted have set us the task of providing greater challenge for our more able children; this is about offering choice, independence... it's about creative teaching and learning.'

With the need to embed good practice throughout

**Enquiry 2010/11: How can we extend the embedding of creative approaches to teaching and learning so that we have a project that combines huge current impact whilst leaving us with a secure legacy?**

the school and the lesson from year two of the dangers of over-investment in individual teachers, the school asked Laban to work across all classes in the final year of the programme.

The project commenced in January 2011 with a half-day Inset at Laban which combined practical workshops with joint planning for topic-based schemes of work incorporating dance. All 17 teachers then received a combination of joint planning, model delivery and mentoring, supported by a series of three further whole-staff Inset sessions. The outcomes were disseminated by the teachers and children through a series of assembly performances, informal sharings and spoken presentations.



## Mayflower Primary School, Tower Hamlets

Mayflower is a large primary school. All the pupils are from minority ethnic groups with the majority being from Bangladeshi backgrounds. Almost all the pupils speak English as an additional language. The school was judged as satisfactory by Ofsted in 2010.

Like Arnhem Wharf, Mayflower was in the process of revising its curriculum at the start of the Change Schools programme in 2008. In the first two years, the Creative Partnerships projects were used to give staff ownership of the new curriculum by working with creative practitioners to plan units of cross-curricular work that included creative entry points to learning and access to cultural opportunities.

All 14 teachers and classes at Mayflower worked with practitioners from Half Moon Young People's Theatre to explore the spring term's topics through drama. Outcomes for children included written pieces and class performances that parents were invited to share. The project opened with a whole-staff Inset day which included time for practitioners and teachers to co-plan a project linked to the term's topic. Over the course of 10 weekly sessions, practitioners moved from delivery to team-teaching, with staff being encouraged to take ever greater responsibility for leading activities. Practitioners introduced a range of drama techniques such as 'hot seating and freeze frames', that teachers could use across the curriculum.

**Enquiry 2010/11: How can we use drama as a way of encouraging and promoting creative and imaginative writing?**





# Outcomes

At the time of writing in June 2011, schools had yet to undertake their final project evaluations and this study therefore draws on mid-project reflections.

At Forest Hill and Arnhem Wharf, senior leaders described the strategic role of the project in school improvement; specifically in moving the quality of teaching and learning from good to outstanding. As such, both were committed to wider forms of monitoring and evaluation including:

- Lesson observation
- Learning walks
- Scrutiny of lesson plans by Heads of Departments (linked to SDP<sup>2</sup> targets)
- Performance management (linked to SDP targets)

Creative Partnerships rightly aligns projects with the SDP but this does lead to difficulty in disentangling the outcomes of its projects from other initiatives at the school. Ultimately, all three schools believe that by embedding creative teaching, students' achievement will rise. Teaching is a complex process however with many variables affecting student outcomes. Senior leaders were rightly cautious therefore in making simple claims of cause and effect for the Creative Partnerships projects.

The two primary schools aimed to develop specific arts-related skills with teachers (dance and drama) and there was ample evidence that this was successfully achieved. Both also saw the project as a vehicle to develop skills and attitudes associated with creative teaching.

Those cited included:

- Risk-taking; to move beyond comfort zones
- Trying things out where the outcome isn't certain
- Reflecting on practice and the impact it has on students' learning
- Creative problem-solving
- The ability to gauge how to respond to children's ideas and enthusiasms.

Evidence indicated success although for some teachers more work was needed to transfer learning from the project to other subject areas. Forest Hill, by contrast, focused more explicitly on creativity. The Coordinator explained, 'we're looking for incremental change in practice. The experiments are quite small but the potential for change is enormous.' The Assistant Head described a Technology lesson she had observed in which students had been asked to design a crazy golf course,

'The boys were given freedom within parameters; student-led with the teacher facilitating. Boys were constructively working in groups: sharing, supporting, negotiating. They were experimenting: no...what about this...? All this creativity and extraordinary progress in National Curriculum terms.'

This example demonstrates how a well constructed lesson can impact on pupil outcomes.

**'The work we have been doing in the dance sessions has definitely had a knock on effect in their classroom work. In literacy, for example, their written work**

**showed a deeper level of understanding and empathy of the characters in the novel as a result of all the exploratory work and reflection we had done in dance.'**  
**(Teacher, Arnhem Wharf)**

Coordinators at Arnhem Wharf and Forest Hill believed the professional development had been particularly beneficial for young and/or newly qualified teachers (NQTs). The Coordinator at Arnhem Wharf observed that young teachers were often 'well but rigidly trained'. There were five NQTs on the staff at the school and he believed the project was a 'golden opportunity to get them to think about learning as you would want.'

An NQT at Mayflower reported being well acquainted with drama techniques, having written his dissertation on Talk for Writing. He was enthusiastic about the project and reported learning new techniques that he had already used in science.

Inadequate time to plan and reflect are often cited by teachers as challenges during projects. Teachers at the primary schools undertook initial planning with practitioners during Inset days. Arnhem Wharf incorporated further joint planning sessions in year group meetings. Teachers reported, 'it is really good that they were planning with us not for us' although they did feel 'pushed for time for everything else.' The practitioners at Mayflower offered a number of drop-in planning sessions<sup>4</sup> but the majority of teachers were unable to attend. Practitioners drew up detailed lesson plans which were sent to the teachers in advance. The Coordinator and practitioners reported that not all teachers had

taken as much ownership of delivery as hoped; the lack of joint planning may be one reason. Whilst the Coordinator at Forest Hill reported 'a certain sadness in some people who are struggling to find time to achieve what they want', the school took a bold step in dedicating significant amounts of time for the learning communities. One of the practitioners reflected on the benefits, 'The dialogue around the process of creating learning experiments has been rich. The teachers are having deep and sometimes difficult conversations with themselves and each other about how well the general structure of modern education, their particular training and the ethos and structure of Forest Hill School are conducive to meeting the needs of their students.'

An unexpected outcome at Forest Hill was the improvement in teacher relationships. The Learning Communities brought together teachers who sometimes barely knew each other but new and productive relationships were forged. This is one factor in the outcome reported at all three schools of increased enjoyment and motivation in teaching.

There was also evidence that through seeing their teachers as fellow learners and/or through more open and interactive lessons, student/teacher relationships had also improved.

**'If you feel comfortable with the teacher and you can talk to them you feel a lot more happy in the lessons but also you want to be involved more and you don't want to get on their nerves.'**  
**(Student, Forest Hill School)**

# Embedding creative learning

All three projects produced resources as a legacy: Laban collated lesson plans and music CDs; Half Moon created 'story boxes' to provide stimulus for drama and storytelling and the school has embedded drama activities into curriculum topic planning. Teachers at Forest Hill are documenting their experiments in a simple PowerPoint format which will be available as an internal online resource.

The Coordinator at Forest Hill explained how the school planned to embed learning, 'by attitudes, mindset and expectations of yourself as a teacher... not giving tips and tricks but by encouraging new ways of thinking about practice.' Evidence from teachers at the school would suggest this aim is being achieved, as one teacher reported, 'Now that I'm thinking this way, the mindset of the project is seeping into all areas of my teaching.' There was an enthusiasm at the school to continue with the learning communities as a vehicle for staff development.

There was evidence from all schools that many teachers now felt confident to change their practice,

**'Actually the ideas are fairly simple and it isn't difficult to plan. Also, as [the dancers] are working with the whole school we are all getting the same experience; an equal insight into this way of working. The whole school will understand this approach when we plan together in the future.'**

**(Key Stage 2 teacher, Arnhem Wharf)**

This quote also suggests the efficacy of a whole-school project for sustainability.

Following the final Inset with Laban, Arnhem Wharf scheduled a staff meeting to explore and extract the creativity at the heart of the project. As the Coordinator said, 'we need to make it explicit so teachers can apply it elsewhere.'

An unexpected outcome at Arnhem Wharf demonstrated a fundamental way of embedding creativity within the school,

'Staff development is also about thinking who we want to be here.'

The Deputy Head described how Creative Partnerships had influenced the school's recruitment process. For a recent appointment, for example, candidates were asked to choose a poem and teach a short lesson with children.

'Some candidates had obviously just googled 'Year 4 poetry lesson' and did an acrostic or something. But others had actually read the poem, understood it and the task, created space for pupil input... that's who gets recruited!'

# Conclusion

A series of six factors can be identified that contributed to the success of these professional development programmes. There is a high level of correlation between the findings and recent research on effective CPD.<sup>5</sup>

## **Whole-school, collaborative CPD**

Research<sup>6</sup> has identified the creation of a collaborative learning environment for teachers as 'the single most important factor' for successful school improvement. All three schools opted to work with their entire teaching staff in this final year of the programme. The collaborative nature of the CPD offered peer support and provided an environment where 'everyone was talking and sharing experiences.' Professional development encouraged reflective practice, exemplified at Forest Hill,

'The big deal here is the reflection: doing something differently and then having the time to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of this approach with fellow professionals.' (Coordinator)

## **Senior leadership**

Senior leaders at all schools recognised the centrality of their role; they provided vision, active commitment and permission to take risks. Crucially, they also authorised the allocation of directed time to the project and adjusted timetables as necessary.

**'Staff need clear messages from someone senior. We need to give out messages about the value and impact of creativity on core skills.'**

**(Deputy Head)**

'To support a culture of risk-taking, senior leaders

are key. We are saying 'Yes it's OK to take risks; it will be buzzy in the classroom but they're on task; that's working noise.' (Assistant Head)

## **School improvement priorities**

All three programmes of staff development linked to school development priorities giving the projects validity and providing rigour to the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

## **Clear links to student learning and outcomes**

All projects had explicit learning objectives for students. Less transparent in some cases was the expected impact of the teachers' learning on student outcomes. During interviews however, it was apparent that senior leaders at all three schools had a clear understanding of the link between creative pedagogies and student achievement; for two of the schools, this was a significant strategy in their journey from good to outstanding.

## **Teacher ownership**

The extent to which teachers chose the focus of their CPD varied between schools. In all cases, however, projects acknowledged teachers' starting points and offered options for professional development. At Mayflower, for example, the technique of 'teacher in role' was introduced. Some teachers lacked the confidence to adopt this approach, some explored the technique with their class whilst two teachers demonstrated the technique to an audience of parents, children and colleagues.

## **Specialist expertise**

Creative practitioners in these schools shared a vast range of new skills and knowledge from dance vocabulary to creative behaviour management strategies. Creative practitioners also introduced different perspectives and thinking; a teacher at



Forest Hill commented, 'bringing in people with non-educational language frees up our thinking and allows new thoughts and ideas.'

The Assistant Head at Forest Hill reflected on the success of the Change School programme

'Creative Partnerships has accelerated progress. Its added intrigue, enthused staff. The expertise of the practitioners has introduced us to different approaches and additional resources.'

## Endnotes

1. Freelance creative project manager responsible for managing the process of a creative partnership within a school.
2. Teachers who volunteered for this role and received additional professional development from practitioners to enable them to take a lead role in future years.
3. School Development Plan
4. This was seen as the best option as no other planning time with teachers could be identified by the school.
5. Cordingley (2011), GTC Qualitative study of school-level strategies for teachers' CPD. Coventry: Curee  
Cordingley et al. (2003), The impact of collaborative CPD on classroom teaching and learning. London: EPPI Centre.
6. Muijs & Lindsay (2006), Evaluating continuing professional development: Testing Guskey's model in the UK

# A New Direction

A New Direction is an organisation that works with and for young Londoners, providing powerful ways for them to access the best of arts and culture.

We do this by working with London's creative and cultural sector, schools and other partners, to generate more opportunities for young people to take part in arts and culture and develop their own creativity.

Through our work, more young people are able to develop their own talents and passion for the arts, and we are committed to helping more young people to identify, experience and move into careers within the creative and cultural sector.

From Spring 2012, we will take a strategic lead for children, young people and the arts in London, working alongside Arts Council England, and in partnership with Apples and Snakes, the Lyric Hammersmith, the Roundhouse and Sadler's Wells.

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