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# 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

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# CREATIVE SCHOOLS LONDON STORMONT HOUSE SCHOOL

Stormont House School is based in the London borough of Hackney, providing education for students aged 11-16 with a wide range of learning difficulties. The school began its first Creative Partnerships project in 2002 and continued the programme until 2008. Since it finished the Creative Partnerships programme the school has continued to invest in creative opportunities for students and staff and has further developed its approaches to creative teaching and learning.

Stormont House's Headteacher, Kevin McDonnell, and Deputy Headteacher, Christina Elford, tell the story of the school's Creative Partnerships experience and its progression since.



**IMAGES**

All photographs  
by Tracy Napier.  
All images taken from  
Stormont House's  
'Creativity Afternoons'  
Image courtesy of  
Stormont House School

## About the school prior to Creative Partnerships

Stormont House was a 'good' school in Ofsted terms before Creative Partnerships. We valued creative projects but started to want to work more collaboratively with arts partners; to be more involved in the planning and completion of projects. There was a growing awareness that it was important that projects should be rooted in what our school felt was right; where capacity was, where the gaps were, ensuring appropriate arts partners were matched to the school who were open to discussion and exploration. We wanted the school to own the process a bit more and felt that the end product should not be limited by a brief. We also wanted teachers to be encouraged and enthused and feel great about their jobs. Creative Partnerships seemed to offer us the chance to explore these opportunities. **Through this programme we could look at changing how subjects are being taught and get teachers out of their comfort zones.** It took a few years to gain the confidence to keep pushing boundaries and we had to keep revisiting our objectives. By 2005 we were judged by Ofsted as 'outstanding'. In 2008 our bid to become a School of Creativity wasn't achieved but we weren't disheartened – we left the programme and aimed to carry on working as we had done.

## Projects and Partnerships

The Creative Partnerships process was about supporting a whole school idea or an opportunity to do something new, and provided the funding to do it. The investment was in the school, rather than in the arts organisation or creative practitioner. This was not about the arts, it was about creativity in education. At our school these processes have filtered into other curriculum areas – using external resources.

At first our Creative Partnership work was slow starting. We began by focusing on teaching creatively and eventually we became more concerned with creative learning. We were encouraged to agree areas across the curriculum where there could be crossovers. This began with individual projects and then started to grow as more teachers saw the results, for example one early project saw a theatre practitioner working collaboratively with a teacher, fitting the project to the needs and competencies of the students. Other teachers watched this process and next we were able to get science teachers on board. Funding from the Creative Partnerships programme enabled science and art visits, which included Eden Project, Barbara Hepworth Gallery, and links with organisations and people such as London Wildlife Trust and a contemporary landscape designer. This science project led to one of the school's most successful creative projects, the creation of our own biodome. It was designed and planted by students, and supported by a landscape designer along with science partners. This made a real impact on the school environment and has gained a real sense of ownership from the students. It has become the school's logo – a symbol or statement for how much we have invested in creativity and risk taking.

We also ran an ambitious programme of weekly 'Creativity Afternoons' for KS3 students across the spring and summer terms of 2007 where both the students and staff had the opportunity to develop new skills in a variety of different fields such as glass forming, sculpture, dance, theatre, photography and filmmaking. We changed the curriculum to support this and made it optional for teachers to be involved. Through its funding streams, Creative Partnerships enabled us to think about legacy; commissioning film or creating exhibitions of work which would document and encapsulate the learning and the relationships. We created a film of the 'Creativity Afternoons' programme, and at the end of the summer term the pupils and teachers presented their work in a production or exhibition. The London School of Economics was involved in evaluating this.

**They found evidence that students developed better teamwork skills through working together on projects across year groups and that the teachers gained greater confidence to build on creative ways of teaching their own subjects.**

However the scale of this project was large and it became difficult to manage and monitor.

We've learned that the success of a relationship between artists and our school is about willingness to take calculated risks and being prepared to make changes if something isn't working. The partnership needs to be flexible and every partner has to expect to learn, as well as the students. In some cases during our involvement with Creative Partnerships the process didn't work well, some of the artists we partnered with had a different idea of project structure and timings which made the partnership process difficult. We also learned that if a project is too big in scale it is difficult to monitor the efficiency of the partners.

## Change and Impact

There were a number of Creative Partnerships initiatives that were real motivators for change in our school. The school's involvement with the 'Preferred Learning Styles' action research programme for schools in East London (2003-5) was the stimulus for the redevelopment of a school vision. Our vision statement consists of four elements that we believe create achievement for all in a unique world class school. Of these four elements, we have included 'placing creativity at the heart of excellent teaching and learning' and 'developing and sustaining vibrant partnerships'. This was an important outcome of the trip to Oklahoma for Creative Partnerships teachers in 2004, which gave us the opportunity to observe international education practices and discuss preferred learning styles, leadership and creativity within a peer group. Additionally there were professional development opportunities such as a creative mentoring programme in 2004-5, and through our relationship with our mentor, Janice McLaren from The Photographers' Gallery, came the realisation that the school was achieving its success criteria. The scheme was important in developing a new connection with the gallery, and with Janice, who is now a member of the school's board of governors.

After our involvement in the Creative Partnerships programme ended in 2008 we started to invest internally. We have incorporated a bidding process into our school where staff can come up with new ideas, plan it and we will find resources to fund it. The timetable is kept flexible to accommodate new ideas. We've learned that learning comes first and we work to support each other through remaining flexible. If something doesn't work, we debate it and move forward. At the moment we are developing a new approach to expressive arts teaching across the school which will eventually encourage students to lead on what they want to learn. We have a plan for what we want students to gain; the transferable skills of confidence, self-esteem, willingness to take risks, resilience, relationship building etc., but it is an open enough framework of options that the content will eventually be driven by the students who have the freedom to say what they want to do next. This approach came directly from our 'Creativity Afternoons' work in 2007. The students will not be assessed, instead we will consider the journey they have gone on; asking questions such as, how well did they participate? Did they take risks?

We gained a lot of new ideas for creative approaches to the delivery of our curriculum and we created a lot of connections with artists through our involvement in Creative Partnerships. We have started to work with two past partners again as they know the school, know the students, and they have a flexible approach, which is important to us.

## Looking forward

Kevin McDonnell and Christina Elford 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:**

- a passion for this way of working. Someone needs to be in place to maintain the passion. If a staff member leaves who will continue to champion this?
- capacity – this requires resources (including financial) and human resilience
- be ambitious but also be realistic
- understand that it takes time – start small and grow
- be open minded and flexible, let it be an organic process
- be demanding but don't limit the outcomes in advance
- think about what journey you want everyone to go on.

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### Recommendations and suggestions to schools seeking out new creative partnerships:

- research the literature on the benefits of creativity and look out new funding resources
- ask yourself what is it about creativity that will make this a better place? Look at generating questions, core teaching and learning, and curriculum mapping
- ask teachers what they would really like to be teaching and what their students deserve to learn. If you feel it is good, do it
- empower teachers to feel that they can change the way they teach and get more out of it
- establish a clear set of initial starting points. Ask yourself what are we missing?
- gain inspiration from elsewhere, share ideas with other schools and listen to other people's successes
- form partnerships with other schools
- discuss progress with teachers
- communicate and share the results of the work.

### School links and project examples

[www.stormonthouse.hackney.sch.uk](http://www.stormonthouse.hackney.sch.uk)

Lessons from America

[www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/lessons-from-america](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/lessons-from-america)

'Institutional Change'

by K McDonnell and M Huane

[www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/institutional-change](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/knowledge/resources/institutional-change)



## A New Direction

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