

# Partners on a Theme

## Enquiry Schools Programme 2010-11

**Creative Partnerships is England's flagship creative learning programme, designed to develop the skills and aspirations of children and young people.**

**Between September 2010 and June 2011, five partnerships across Sussex, each comprising a lead cultural organisation and a cluster of partner schools or early years settings, were selected to take part in the Creative Partnerships Enquiry Schools programme. Each partnership was given the opportunity to explore the relationship of creativity to teaching and learning in relation to a specific theme.**

The themes, relating to the strategic priorities for Creative Partnerships, Sussex and Surrey, were:

- **Sustainability and the Environment**
- **Engaging Parents and Families**
- **Employability and Enterprise**
- **Early Years**
- **Inclusion and Diversity**

Each partnership was offered the opportunity to work with a single or group of creative practitioners.

In some cases, relationships already existed between the lead organisations and the participating schools and early years settings, but in many cases these relationships were new.

An enquiry project runs over three terms, with the first term being devoted to partnership building and planning, the second term to delivery and the third term to evaluation and reflection. Participants used an enquiry framework; each partnership formulating a question as a focus for participatory research.



# Sustainability and the Environment

Developing young people as global citizens through sustainable development education is a key context for learning. Sustainability offer learners an opportunity to engage with complex ethical issues relating to climate change, social justice, interdependence, health and wellbeing and biodiversity.

The green sector is also projected to be a major employer, as the UK makes the transition towards a low carbon economy.

## Who was involved?

### **Lead cultural organisation:**

Great Dixter House and Gardens, East Sussex

### **Schools:**

Brede Primary School, Beckley CE Primary School, Northiam CE Primary School

### **Creative practitioners:**

Rachel Bennington, Persephone Pearl

## Objectives

Great Dixter House and Gardens in East Sussex wanted to develop strong relationships with the local community, particularly with schools and families. The project team articulated this aspiration as a question: *'How can creative exploration of the landscape be used to sensitise children to the local environment, fostering curiosity about sustainability and promoting links between schools, Great Dixter and the local community?'*



## What happened?

Children from three local primary schools worked with storyteller and outdoor practitioner Rachel Bennington, puppeteer Persephone Pearl, and Great Dixter Education Officer Catherine Haydock on activities all set within the gardens and woods of Great Dixter.

Activities included puppet making, storytelling and fire skills, and were designed to inspire the imagination of the young people and develop an understanding of the natural landscape at Great Dixter. This in turn provided opportunities for cross curricular learning.

Children were encouraged to view the gardens as special and magical, encouraging them to respect and value their surroundings. On their magical journey into the woods the children 'discovered' an enclosure specifically created for the project which included a sheltered wooden fire circle.



## Impacts

The project has helped the children to respect and value the natural environment, and developed their creative skills, writing and story making skills. They also developed their confidence and ability to work in groups.

*"It's different. At school you don't learn about puppets and get to play. Being outside gave me a different view."* (Child)

*"When I'm thinking what to write I'm thinking about the words to write now."* (Child)

Teachers learnt new skills around outdoor learning, through practical sessions with children and CPD days with creative practitioners. Teachers learned about fire making and woodland skills, and also gained new ideas for using storytelling in the classroom.

*"Thank you so much. We have in place a strong plan for how we are going to sustain the spirit of this work - it's too important not to!"* (Headteacher, Beckley CE Primary School)



The Education Officer has developed her skills and experience, and a range of imaginative approaches to engaging schools and families at Great Dixter.

*"The creative approach sat really well with the Dixter style of working - and the range of activity undertaken opened [my] eyes and improved [my] skills."* (Education Officer, Great Dixter House and Gardens)

Creative practitioners have developed their skills, and gained experience in balancing the practical and creative elements of delivery to groups of young children.



## Next steps

Models of activity developed through this project will inform the future programme at Great Dixter's new education centre (opening September 2011). A celebration party launching the centre will involve all partners and the wider community.

Several families have returned to Great Dixter since the project, and took part in activities during the school holidays. Great Dixter will continue to encourage these visits by offering half price entry to families.

Teachers intend to continue to use natural materials creatively within their teaching and further develop their own story telling techniques.

Creative practitioners intend to continue their relationships with Great Dixter.

# Engaging Parents and Families

**Parental involvement in education is an important factor in children's learning. Family learning can also help tackle issues facing society such as social exclusion, and poor health. Family Learning can have wide cost benefits: impact on health, family relations, lifelong learning and active citizenship.** (Family Learning: Agenda for action: Campaign for Learning, ContinYou, NIACE: 2004)

## Who was involved?

### **Lead cultural organisation:**

Towner, Eastbourne

### **Schools:**

Oakwood Primary School, Bourne County Primary School, Langney Primary School

### **Creative practitioners:**

Saj Fareed, Ed Boxall, Karen Taylor

## Objectives

Towner, the contemporary art museum, worked with three local primary schools. Each worked with different year groups, and almost none of the children involved had any experience of visiting Towner. All three schools shared challenges with parental involvement in general.

The project aimed to explore how families can become actively and creatively involved with the learning of young people through experiencing Towner.

This project was directly inspired by the environment and the collections of Towner. It was hoped that through working creatively with creative practitioners and experiencing the gallery at first hand, children and their parents



would become more actively engaged in the learning process - in the gallery and in the schools.

## What happened?

The project culminated in Towner Take Over day when the children literally 'took over' Towner, creating interactive installations within traditional and non-traditional exhibition spaces (such as the public lift).

Activity included workshops at school, trips to and activities with parents at Towner and creative tasks to do at home with their families. Each school worked with their practitioner to explore different approaches - these varied from working with recycled materials and textiles to creating shared stories and artefacts. Children from nursery/reception to Year 5 explored themes of place and identity to create pieces to go into the gallery which were curated by the children at Towner Take Over day.



## Impacts

For Towner this was the biggest education project they had run since they opened. They now have evidence of increased family engagement with many families visiting for the first time and then returning.

*“Outstanding work by young children, staff and inspirational artist.”* (Parent)

*“Excellent interaction, love the idea and the resulting work.”* (Parent)

As a direct result of the project the schools have similarly reported greatly increased levels of parental involvement and at least one school has evidenced a massive improvement in children’s communication and writing skills. An example was given of a reception child with language skills of an 18 month old who by the end of the project had the language skills of a 5 year old.

The general increase in communication skills was described as ‘overwhelming – far in excess of what the school had anticipated’.

The impact on children with special needs was particularly impressive. Children rose to the challenges and took ownership of the project and the risk-taking by the gallery was well rewarded.

*“I liked using the glue and making things and seeing it all completed it was amazing and I loved hearing the story and thinking of all the magical things.”* (Child)

## Next steps

Future projects may explore home learning and exchanging roles – for example pupils leading their parents around the gallery. Towner and the schools are committed to building on this work and to continuing to develop relationships with each other.

The project has provided teachers with creative material to develop in future and new relationships with parents have been initiated which the schools are determined to develop.



# Employability and Enterprise

**Brighton and Hove hosts the biggest cluster of creative businesses and organisations in the South East outside London. The creative industries are now a key employment sector for the city, accounting for 20% of businesses and more than 10% of employment.** ([www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk))

**Relevant work experience is essential to employment in the creative industries, but young people often struggle to find relevant and meaningful placements to provide them with the skills they need.**

## Who was involved?

### **Lead cultural organisation:**

Same Sky, Brighton and Hove

### **Schools:**

Blatchington Mill School, Heathfield Community College, Uckfield Community Technology College

### **Creative practitioners:**

Sharon Mee, Nikki Gunson, Patrick Bullock, Tasha Padbury, Rosaria Gracia, Hazel Varah, Alex Buckley

## Objectives

Same Sky set out to investigate: *'How can a real life event offer young people the opportunity to creatively co-construct their own work experience programme, delivering creative and employability skills for them and providing a viable model of collaborative work experience for schools and organisations?'* with three secondary schools, Blatchington Mill School, Heathfield Community College and Uckfield Community Technology College.



## What happened?

Same Sky devised a creative and student-led model of work experience, leading to relevant experiences and the development of real employability skills. The project was based on the real life event of the Brighton Children's Parade, which takes place in May each year. In January 2011, 18 sixth form students (aged 16 and 17) and eight creative practitioners met at a 'Creative Carousel' event, and after selecting areas of interest all received training tailored to their specific work experience pathway. All students took on significant roles and responsibilities in the development and delivery of the final event in May.

Participating students had a range of ambitions: from theatrical production management to journalism, to a career in the police force.

## Impacts

Students gained creative skills relevant to their chosen pathway, including carnival making, dance, costume, music and filmmaking. Many became clearer about their career goals. Students also gained employability skills, for example administrative and organisational



skills, project management skills, producing marketing mailouts, attending meetings with the police and the local authority, running the in-house materials 'shop', production and stage management of the final event.

The experience also had positive impacts on students' attitudes to in-school learning.

*"Because I've fallen in love with this, it's given me the incentive to work hard and do this in my life. I know the grades I need to get in [to a degree course in Events Management]; I know what I'm aiming for."* (Y12 student)

All schools consider the project to be a great success, and having devised this model of work experience are keen to embed it into their respective sixth forms' offering.

*"They've all done so well. It's possible to forget what young people are capable of."* (Teacher)

Same Sky and its creative practitioners were impressed by the students' commitment and clear that their involvement had added value to the final event – this year's Children's Parade



was one of the most successful ever and the students' role contributed to this success.

*"Some of the best crew I've worked with."*  
(Creative practitioner)

## Next steps

Creative Partnerships, Same Sky and the three partner schools are now investigating ways of developing an ongoing creative internship programme, and are looking for partner organisations to help progress this work.

Blatchington Mill School intends to continue its relationship with Same Sky, and repeat this work experience programme in Brighton, while Uckfield and Heathfield colleges are working with Same Sky to develop a similar programme using the Uckfield Festival and Big Day out in 2012.





# Early Years

**According to Born Creative, published by Demos ahead of Dame Clare Tickell's review into early years education for the Government, children exposed to creative learning in early years education are the key to a prosperous modern economy.**

This project was part of a larger programme, Open Sesame!, involving eight early years settings, eight creative practitioners and a range of arts and education partners including: Chichester Festival Theatre, South East Dance, The Hawth Crawley, University of Chichester and the Early Childhood Service and Arts Service at West Sussex County Council. Three lead settings opted to be part of the Enquiry Schools programme.

## Who was involved?

### **Lead cultural organisation:**

West Sussex Arts Service

### **Early years settings:**

The Ark Nursery, Lancing Children and Family Centre Nursery, Woodstock Day Nursery

### **Creative practitioners:**

Jane Gordon, Jenny Staff, Alex Sutton-Vane

## Objectives

This partnership explored the impact that working with artists has on early years practitioners' sense of their own creativity and subsequently their ability to support young children's creativity. The partnership also wanted to advocate the importance of creativity in early years settings more effectively to parents.



## What happened?

The partnership developed a master-class model to support early years practitioners to work with artists to build their confidence to work creatively with young children.

Additionally, each of the three lead settings translated these overall objectives into setting-specific questions. The Ark Nursery focused on problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; Woodstock Day Nursery looked at relationships between children's learning, staff learning, families and the wider community; and Lancing Nursery focused on children's individual learning needs and interests.

Each setting worked with a creative practitioner to explore these themes. At Woodstock Day Nursery, musician Alex Sutton-Vane used instruments, wind up toys, songs and sounds. At The Ark Nursery, artist Jenny Staff used recycled materials and outdoor play. At Lancing Nursery, artist Jane Gordon explored clay and other natural materials in the outdoor environment. For each setting, project work culminated in a sharing event attended by parents and carers, children, and the local community.



## Impacts

This skill sharing programme has been very successful at raising early years practitioners' confidence to work creatively with very young children.

*"We didn't expect it to bridge across so many areas of learning beyond the problem solving, reasoning and numeracy, it improved communication between the children, it impacted on individuals in different ways, for example one parent commented that now her child does not mind getting messy."* (Early years practitioner)

Each setting saw improvements in children's skills relating to the Foundation Stage curriculum. Staff and parents noted children's engagement and interest, and the range of creative skills developed, for example around music, messy play, use of materials, communication and group working.

*"It is good to see at first hand the fruits of the Creative Partnerships project at Lancing Nursery where both children and practitioners have clearly thrown themselves in with enormous enthusiasm and gusto. Learning and growing up is about much more than just what comes out of a text book and the use of imaginative art and play clearly stretches and encourages the children to engage and socialise fully."* (Tim Loughton MP)

## Next steps

Open Sesame! is continuing to develop its master-class model to develop creative skills and raise confidence amongst early years practitioners. It intends to develop a CPD course for early years practitioners through the University of Chichester and is looking for partners to support this.

All partners are committed to building ongoing relationships and skill sharing between artists and settings.



# Inclusion and Diversity

**Inclusion and diversity are key themes in citizenship education and central to how young people see themselves and relate to others. Through becoming aware of ones own identity and behaviour, students may gain greater insight into how this differs from – and is similar to – others' experience, encouraging broader tolerance.**

**Teachers sometimes express a lack of confidence about approaching these issues in class with pupils; creative education can provide helpful approaches to exploring identity, inclusion and diversity with pupils.**

## Who was involved?

### **Lead cultural organisation:**

Chichester Festival Theatre, West Sussex

### **Schools:**

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bewbush  
Community Primary School, Seal Primary  
School

### **Creative practitioners:**

Emily Mundy, Naomi Durston

## Objectives

Partners wanted to investigate how exploring identity with an emphasis on building confidence, tolerance and awareness, could better prepare children for starting secondary school. This intention was phrased as a question: *'How can theatre enable Year 6 pupils to explore identity in a period of change?'.* Schools also wanted to use drama to improve writing skills.



## What happened?

Creative practitioners Emily Mundy and Naomi Durston led explorations of identity and writing through creating poems and stories for performance, and making stories using the six-part story method. Pupils developed stories about transition using a central character going on a journey and exploring challenges and sources of support.



Pupils also attended a performance of *Goodnight Mister Tom* at Chichester Festival Theatre, and schools were given an education resource pack to continue exploration of the play in the classroom. The project culminated in a sharing event at Chichester Festival Theatre. Schools presented work developed from the same central focus, stimuli and resources.

## Impacts

Pupils developed a range of creative and communication skills, particularly around working with others and expressing difficult feelings and improved their awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses as learners.

Half of the pupils in one school believed that increased confidence was the most important and significant outcome for them. In another, a number of pupils also made unexpected improvements in their literacy skills.

*“There were some people really nervous and also a bit sad about leaving primary school. We shared our feelings with the group and then sort of made up little dramas about them. And people understood.”* (Child)

Teachers identified new skills and activities, for example the six-part story. They also discussed becoming braver and more experimental, modelling risk-taking for pupils, and strengthening their relationships with individual children.

*“They have learnt to say something without being frightened of getting it wrong. A lot of them are not frightened to say ‘I’m not 100% sure but this is what I think’, and that’s great.”* (Teacher)

Chichester Festival Theatre gained new ideas about engaging schools and their pupils in its programme.

*“The project really demanded that we focus on progression for children and the schools which previously we hadn’t stretched ourselves on.”* (Chichester Festival Theatre)

Creative practitioners gained a new appreciation of partnerships with teachers, and skills for making these partnerships successful.

## Next steps

Chichester Festival Theatre intends to expand the breadth of its work with primary schools.

Creative practitioners are planning an article based on the project focusing on the links between applied theatre, education and therapeutic theatre.

Teachers are keen to distill the learning from the project further and identify ways that those elements of greatest value can be embedded.

Some children have joined CFT youth theatre as a result of participating in the project.



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