

**POPLAR
CONSORTIUM
CELEBRATING
5 YEARS OF
ARTISTS IN
SCHOOLS**

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5 YEARS OF THE POPLAR PARTNERSHIP AN INTRODUCTION

In 2013 Bow Arts set out to create a different way of delivering arts education.

The consortium was founded on the principles of collaboration, shared learning and economies of scale, and was designed to bring schools together. We'd been working with many of the Poplar schools individually, some for as long as 15 years, and could see similar themes and challenges across school settings. It seemed an obvious step to bring the schools together in order to work more collaboratively, to pool resources and share ideas.

From those beginnings, a remarkable body of artist-led projects, training, exhibitions and events have taken place. The ambition has grown year on year across the consortium, and in turn the children's ideas and creativity have been able to flourish.

The accomplishments over the past five years have not just been about a remarkable group of schools, stand-out individuals or visionary leaders. The success of the partnership is, I believe, simply about an openness, a willingness, and our ability to grow over time. We didn't come together

with the attitude of 'what can I get', or 'what can I take', but with the spirit of 'what can I offer', 'what can I share'. That's what makes us richer.

Five Years of the Poplar Partnership offers us a moment to reflect. We consider how modest beginnings have grown into ambition and scale; on the combination of trust, exploration and risk that are now integral to our work; on the themes and characteristics that much of the work has tapped in to. We celebrate the creation of remarkable art commissions and inspirational spaces; the playful exploration of new or unusual materials; the testing of concepts and processes; and the genuine commitment to pupils shaping their own learning, becoming leaders in their own right.

We've worked closely with the subject leaders over the last five years, from mud larking on the Thames, a co-ordinator meeting around the open fire of forest school, to whisking teachers away for day trips of creative rejuvenation. I enjoy the sense of possibility, of individuals bringing something of themselves. I'm a firm believer in making space, a little mischief and investing in our teachers in the same way that they invest in their pupils. It's a tough job, and they

certainly deserve something back.

I'm immensely proud of our work with the Poplar partnership:

- the unstoppable energy and ideas of the countless children and young people we have worked with
- the skill and generosity of the Bow Arts artists
- the care and passion of our Education Project Managers
- the openness of Art Coordinators
- the dedication of remarkable teachers and subject leaders.

Without any one of you, the partnership would not have been the same.

I hope this publication is a celebration. I hope it shares ideas, inspiration and learning with the same generosity that the partnership has imbued. I hope it makes the case for long-term, sustained ways of working that builds arts and culture into the lifeblood of children and young people.

I hope you enjoy finding out more.

Rob Smith,

Head of Education, Bow Arts

THE CONSORTIUM MODEL - WHAT IS IT?

The consortium model was born out of a desire to collaborate, share and develop arts education provision for children and teachers who work in the same ward. The model involves schools and Bow Arts working together and pooling resources to address shared priorities and needs, with the aim to improve visual arts practice across the schools. The consortium model is delivered through two main strands: individual projects within schools and a shared programme.

INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

Each school's individual project is co-planned alongside the Art Coordinator, Project Manager and artist, with a particular aim, challenge or outcome in mind. It's less about off-the-shelf projects, or a menu of options, and more about pooling the ideas and skills of the project leads and coming up with a creative starting point or challenge, bespoke to the context of that particular school. This allows schools to focus on their own priorities, aims and ambitions, and consider how artists can help to address these.

SHARED PROGRAMME

The shared programme aims to support schools to share practice and build networks across a borough. Through termly meetings, CPD sessions and creative away days, Art Coordinators are given time and space to learn from one another, the Bow Arts Education team and a range of artists. They share ideas, discuss challenges and learn skills and approaches in order to strengthen the creative education experience in their schools.

Similarly, holiday programmes and annual celebration events provide opportunities for children across the consortium to meet like-minded peers and create together in workshops. The annual celebration event includes a professionally curated exhibition, which brings together outcomes from all aspects of the programme. It is a key moment in showing the wider community the value of the children and teachers' creative contributions as exhibiting artists, designers and makers.

INTRODUCING THE POPLAR PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS



WELLINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Wellington is a successful, happy and forward-thinking school. We pride ourselves on our rich and varied curriculum, and the wider opportunities our children have. They tell us they love their learning and enjoy coming to school. The school opened in 1928, and has been redeveloped to improve our learning spaces and create an environment fit for learning in the 21st century. We currently have 450 pupils on roll, aged between 3 years and 11 years.

Wellington's motif references a historical timeline which was produced by artist Carl Stevenson in 2017 (year 3) in collaboration with pupils. The rocket represents space travel.



LANSBURY LAWRENCE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Lansbury Lawrence Primary school is a successful, multi-cultural nursery and primary school in the heart of Poplar in the East London Borough of Tower Hamlets. They have two forms of entry from Reception to Year 6 and a large nursery of 120 pupils. Previously known as Susan Lawrence Primary and Elizabeth Lansbury Nursery, the school was designed by architects Yorke, Rosenberg and Mardell and opened in 1951 as an example of 'Live Architecture' as part of the Festival of Britain. The school remains a site of historical interest, for the architecture and public artworks by British artist, designer and educator, Peggy Angus. The school is surrounded by a secret garden and woodland area where children can learn, explore and play.

Lansbury Lawrence's motif references a contemporary artwork commissioned in 2017 (year 3) where artist and designer Haidée Drew worked with pupils to explore the heritage of their building, producing a permanent sculptural artwork for the school.



MAYFLOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mayflower Primary School is a nursery and primary school with 395 pupils on roll. Named after The Mayflower Ship, famous for taking early pioneers to America, the school aims for the same inventive spirit as they strive for excellence in learning. Mayflower wants all pupils to be successful, and are constantly searching for new and innovative ways to make learning exciting, so that everyone at Mayflower enjoys the sense of adventure learning brings and discovers how learning changes lives.

Mayflower's motif references light-house structures that were commissioned in 2017 (year 3) by pupils and made by artist duo Sharp Objects to transform their playground and be used as outdoor exhibition structures.



ST SAVIOUR'S CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

St Saviour's CE School is a one form entry primary school situated on Chrisp Street, Poplar with a school roll of approximately 234 children. St Saviour's CE School has a long, rich history, with the school mirroring many local and national events which have shaped Poplar life since Victorian times. From being founded in the 1860s to help the poor - to suffering bombing during the first half of the 20th century and being rebuilt at a time of hope in the 1950s. Today we have at our heart the spiritual and moral wellbeing of all our pupils; striving for excellence whilst not being elitist and keeping the faith whilst remaining inclusive in serving a multicultural community.

St Saviour's CE motif references their Victorian inspired interactive installation, created by artist Sara Heywood in 2015 (year 2) to commemorate the school's 150th birthday.



MANORFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Manorfield is a happy and exciting learning community that nurtures high attainment and ongoing success for all. The vision of the school is to be high-achieving and at the heart of the community, where children learn effectively and everyone is valued as an individual. Manorfield Primary School dates back to 1953 when it was built as a temporary school built with prefabricated cement blocks. As an infant and junior school there were only six classes accommodating up to 180 pupils. Later a nursery was added. It is understood that the name Manorfield was derived from the fact it had been built on the manor fields belonging to the Lower Manor of Bromley.

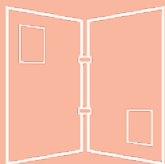
Manorfield's motif references a design project where artist and designer Haidée Drew worked with pupils in 2018 (year 4) to develop ideas for a commission to help transform the school's Key Stage 1 corridor.



BYGROVE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Bygrove is an outstanding one-form entry primary school serving a multicultural community in Poplar. Bygrove has been a National Teaching School since 2013, supporting other schools and alongside our alliance partners, training the next generation of outstanding teachers. We may be small but we think big! Our pupils are at the heart of everything we do. They are happy, friendly and well-behaved and they love learning. They achieve results in all subjects that are well above the national average and consistently make much better progress than their peers nationally too.

Bygrove Primary's motif references a literacy project led by illustrator Mark Oliver in 2018 (year 4) that encouraged pupils to produce cut-paper collages of their favourite characters and moments in novels, which were then used to produce a permanent artwork in the school library.



STEBON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Stebon is a happy three-form entry school serving a multicultural, though predominately Bangladeshi community in Poplar. Following recent refurbishments and a state-of-the-art extension our premises provide bright, spacious and comfortable learning spaces that pupils love.

These include a dedicated Art/D&T space, an outdoor classroom and a very beautiful Chelsea garden. Staff and pupils are ambitious and confident. Performance at KS2 shows our pupils outperform their national peers and make more progress too. The school serves and is surrounded by the Burdett Estate, itself refurbished in 2001. It's this position at the heart of our community that gives Stebon School its unique feel and platform to succeed.

Stebon's motif references a modular display space developed by artists and designers Milly Peck and Finn Thomson in 2018 (year 4), in response to a project where artists used Philosophy for Children methods as a starting point to develop stories with artist Poppy Green and make illustrated books with artist Julie Vermeille. The structures act as a space to exhibit these works.



WOOLMORE PRIMARY SCHOOL

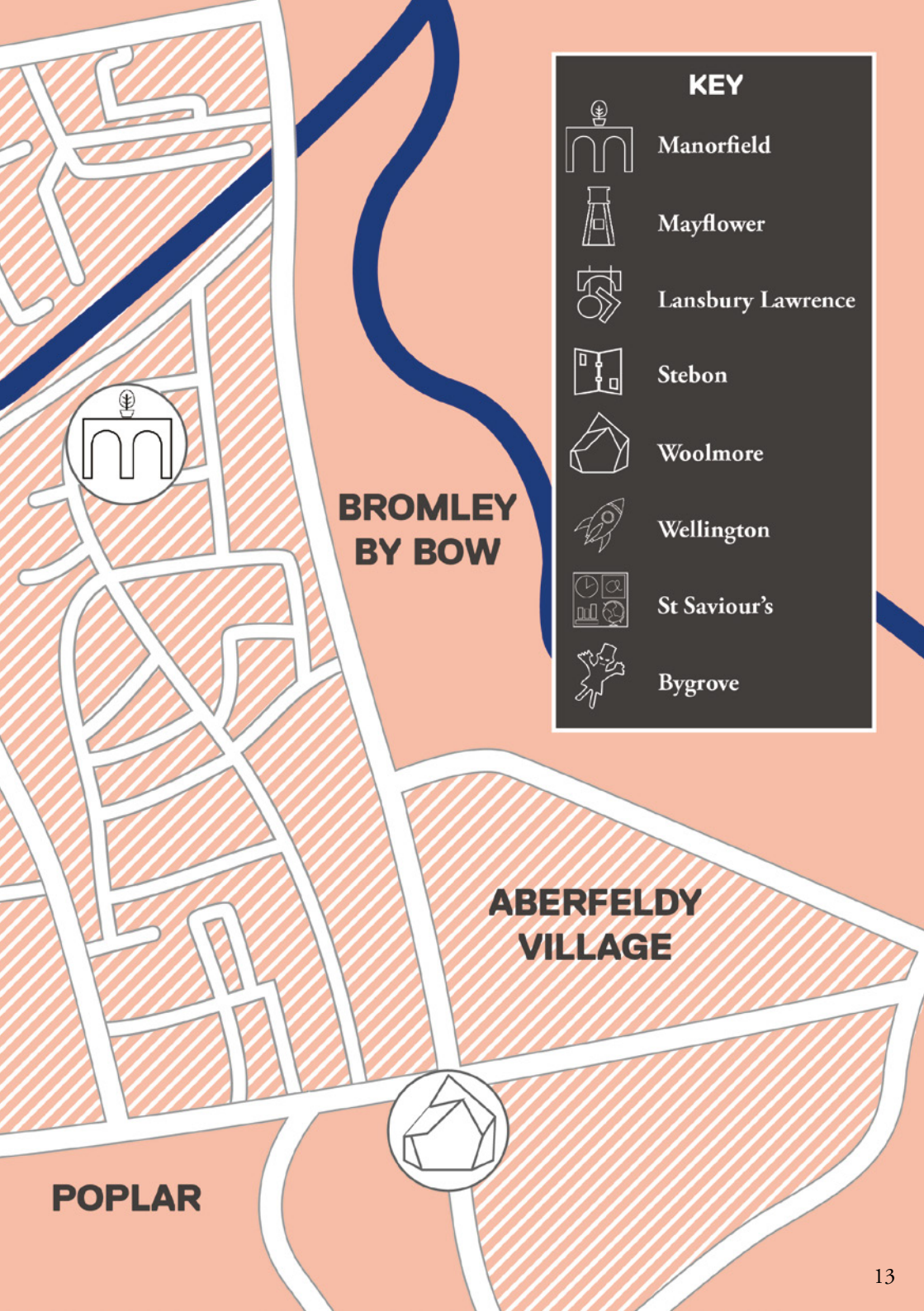
Woolmore is a happy, inclusive and exciting place to learn and our children love coming to school. In order to ensure that every child achieves success we ask ourselves 'what would it take?' and then we do it! We offer children great teaching, guidance and we help them grow into good global citizens.

In February 2015 Woolmore moved into a brand new school building that will, eventually, be a three-form entry primary school.

Woolmore's motif references a permanent structure built for the reception playground, created by artist Kirsti Davies in 2018 (year 4), made in response to being in residence with the Early Years team at Woolmore.



LIMEHOUSE



KEY



Manorfield



Mayflower



Lansbury Lawrence



Stebon



Woolmore



Wellington



St Saviour's



Bygrove

**BROMLEY
BY BOW**

**ABERFELDY
VILLAGE**

POPLAR

SHELTER

Woolmore Primary School



WHAT HAPPENED?

Shelter focused on Early Years, with the aim to address the lack of creative play opportunities in the Reception playground at Woolmore. Artist Kirsti Davies was tasked to create an artwork or apparatus that would stimulate creative exploration and play. The artwork was to be used collaboratively by pupils to develop role play, gross motor, fine motor and sensory skills. Kirsti initially spent time in the school, playing with Reception pupils in their playground to allow an insight into how the children liked to play and to understand what was missing from their outdoor space. Kirsti then began a period of testing materials and objects with Reception pupils to see how they responded. She brought in canes, string, fabric and willow, which contrasted to the plastic toys often used in the playground. The workshops were open-ended and experimental, allowing pupils the opportunity to try things out and see what happened.

‘It has been nice to work on a project where we can really focus on the children’s ideas and opinions in creating something for their outside play area. It has led us to be more creative with materials we have in school. Inviting an artist into school has been wonderful, giving a fresh perspective

and allowing precious time to be allocated to being creative.’

Laura Coates, Art Coordinator, Woolmore Primary School

In one workshop, pupils began making individual dens that morphed into one immersive environment. Some pupils were focused on producing a sturdy den, while others focused more on playing, naming spaces of the dens, imagining the view out and their roles within their newly formed environment.

‘It is cosy and warm and there’s a fire in here and we are cosy.’

Early Years pupil, Woolmore Primary School

On reflection, the workshop demonstrated the active role children play in facilitating their own creative learning, with imaginative play being an important part of experiencing the world from new and multiple perspectives. This demonstrated the importance of producing an apparatus that stimulated creative play dictated by the children and enjoyed in multiple ways.

WHO TOOK PART?

From the outset, it was agreed that an artist



would work with and consult both staff and pupils to develop an outcome based on their findings from spending time in school. Kirsti delivered CPD workshops and consultation sessions with the Early Years team, from which it became paramount that the final outcome needed to be something useful. Teachers discussed how time was precious, and anything too delicate or difficult to use would soon be broken or discarded. Shelter was continually mentioned as something the playground was in need of.

OUTCOMES

Kirsti presented the school with two designs for their artwork. The chosen design – selected unanimously by pupils and teaching staff – is both a structure, a shelter and the starting point for creative play. It is a small sculptural building made with soft timber, ergonomically designed for the reception pupils. The ‘shop-front’ and ‘entrance’ will be used as starting points for creative role-play. There is also the opportunity to use the space for performance, outdoor teaching and other creative activities.

OUTPUTS

- 1 planning meeting
- 2 Early Years CPD sessions
- 2 artist-led workshops
- 5 days artist days for design and fabrication

1 day installation of Shelter

KEY IMPACT AND LEARNING

The consultative approach taken throughout this project allowed a greater understanding and knowledge of the time-constraints faced by staff, encouraging us to think about keeping our approach simple, useful and effective. Workshops enabled us to reflect on group creativity, with children playing alongside each other to enhance their lived and imagined experiences. We wanted the outcome to support this type of divergent learning, to act as a catalyst to open-ended play. The school’s Art Coordinator was present from initiation to outcome. There was a feeling of trust and shared ownership, which enabled collaborative conditions throughout. For example, after sessions we would plan the next stage of the project, reflecting and responding to what happened and using this as a starting point for the next workshop.



**‘THAT’S A
TELESCOPE, AND
I SLEEP THERE. I
LOOK OUT OF MY
TELESCOPE AND I
SEE THE BIG BAD
WOLF.’**

Early Years Pupil. Woolmore Primary School

MASTERING A MATERIAL

Manorfield Primary School



WHAT HAPPENED?

‘Mastering a Material’ focused on the question ‘What does it take to master an art?’ as a starting point to explore one material: glass. Working with artists Damien Robinson and glass specialist Shelley James, a class of Year 5 children took part in a series of workshops to explore the material qualities of glass.

Pupils initially took part in workshops in school. Damien Robinson set out experiments to help pupils better understand glass – its materiality and how it has been used practically throughout history. Workshops included making a camera obscura, water microscopes and a stained ‘glass’ window from sugar.

‘The group have become more confident in questioning, developing both their wider understanding and feeding their creative curiosity. Exploring through hands-on learning how glass has impacted on so much of the world we take for granted’

Damien Robinson, Lead Artist

Pupils then had the opportunity to learn more about the different ways glass can be used – for industry and artistic ends. In a visit to artist Shelley James’ studio, they were given the opportunity to learn about techniques used to manipulate and change glass. They sandblasted patterns onto drinking glasses, bent glass rods

using a candle, and fused real glass pieces in a microwave.

WHO TOOK PART?

This project needed many different experts in order to best articulate to the pupils the myriad ways materials can be used. As well as meeting artists, pupils also visited a glass-blower’s workshop, and were able to experience glassworks being produced on an industrial scale, whilst also seeing how artists might use glass in their practice.

OUTCOMES

Pupils all made sandblasted patterned glass cups and a series of handmade fused glass art pieces for permanent display in school.

OUTPUTS

- 1 planning meeting
- 4 artist-led sessions in school
- 1 trip to a glassblowing studio
- 1 trip to Cockpit Arts

‘I have learnt that glass can be like honey if you melt it, and that you can make things in different ways. I have also learned you can’t see sand coming out of the gun because it comes out really fast.’

Pupil feedback, Manorfield Primary School

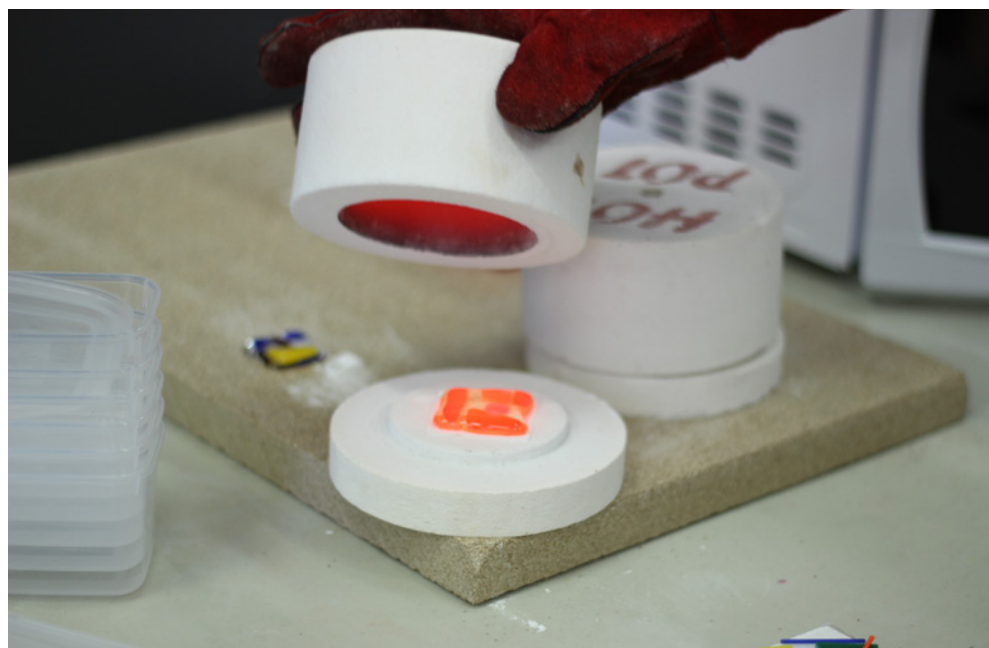
KEY IMPACT AND LEARNING

Pupils gained practical skills in experimenting with glass, including sand blasting and heat forming. These were processes that were made possible through sourcing key experts and carrying out thorough risk assessments and logistical planning to make these activities accessible for pupils. Pupils gained a greater understanding of the creative investigation process around a specific topic and medium, and were able to better appreciate material processes and the different states a material can go through, through doing. This tacit understanding was paramount to the success of this project. This project posed many risks and was reliant on trust and hard-work from all partners to ensure all practical workshops were safe. This experimentation and testing was seen and appreciated by other Poplar schools, which had a ripple-effect on others exploring new materials with their students.

‘What was just as important was the exhibition and how many other conversations I had with the other Coordinators, with them saying ‘Wow – you did this in school?’ – It was more like setting a kind of bar for something that can be very experimental’

Kirsty Lowry, former Education Project Manager, Bow Arts





**‘IMAGINE SEEING A YOUNG
PERSON MELT GLASS, OR
BLAST IT WITH A SAND GUN,
OR BEND IT WITH A GAS
FLAME. WE ALL KNEW THAT
THIS WAS AN EXPERIENCE
THESE PUPILS WOULD
NEVER FORGET. IT FELT LIKE
BEING IN WILLY WONKA’S
FACTORY, BUT WITH RISK
ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTS.’**

John Mayson, Former Art Coordinator,
Manorfield Primary School

MADE IN POPLAR

Mayflower Primary School



WHAT HAPPENED?

The focus of 'Made in Poplar' was twofold: for children to learn new creative skills using casting and mould making processes and to provide a platform for them to share their learning and expertise amongst their peers and teaching staff.

Artist Maisie Maris worked with a small steering group of pupils from Years 1 to 6 to introduce the processes behind working with alginate, jesmonite, cement and plaster. The project started with workshops in school where pupils were given the opportunity to work in a materials-led way. Firstly, by exploring different material properties and textures, and then by considering their use in their local community and the wider world.

Maisie provided insights into her own practice throughout, placing an emphasis on the inspiration and research stages to encourage an open, considered approach to the pupils' design and making. She also led a research walk to the Barbican, inviting pupils to collect as many visual elements as possible, and build a mood board as starting inspiration for their artworks.

All of the research undertaken informed the discussions around what was possible for the making stages of the project. The group

conducted ceramics market research – all the while considering what they thought constituted a saleable product. In keeping with the project learning and discoveries, a collection of cast jewellery and homeware was developed – which referenced the visual and material cultures of Poplar. The artworks were then priced up and brought to Bow Arts to sell in the Nunnery Gallery shop. As part of the visit, pupils also led a practical workshop for Bow Arts staff and studio artists to walk the participants through how the artworks were made.

WHO TOOK PART?

Mayflower selects 'Cultural Ambassadors' from each year group in the school. These pupils act as representatives for their classes – making decisions around their creative and cultural learning and opportunities on offer across the academic year.

'I have learnt how to make jewellery and homeware using alginate, jesmonite, cement and plaster.'

Year 5 pupil feedback

OUTCOMES

Pupils all made cast objects using jesmonite and concrete. Objects were both decorative and sculptural. Pupils were keen to develop items that linked back to the school, as

well as iconic east London buildings such as Balfron Tower and Robin Hood Gardens. As part of the school's enterprise activity these were then sold (by the children) at Bow Arts' Nunnery Gallery and Bow Road Open Studios event as well as at several local maker's markets.

The pupils also kept records of their project progress and research – and created step-by-step guides as a tool for sharing their learning with their peers.

OUTPUTS

- 1 planning meeting
- 5 artist-led sessions in school
- 2 artist studio days
- 1 trip to the Nunnery Gallery
- 2 peer-led CPD for teaching staff

KEY IMPACT AND LEARNING

The aim with Made in Poplar was to place an emphasis on the process – both in practical skills related to sculpture and as a general guideline for creating artwork. Rather than attempt to define what the artworks might look like at the start of the project, the intention was to preserve enough time for the children to conduct their own explorations and to build up their confidence and familiarity with working with the associated materials and techniques.

Maisie encouraged the children to be self-reflexive with their learning and to share their findings at regular intervals. Each workshop started and finished with an open forum discussion, where the pupils thoughtfully reflected on what had worked (and what had not) as well as sharing their ideas for the next stage of the process. This 'ideas marketplace' raised both the quality of experience, insofar as the children were able to confidently share and demonstrate each technique learnt, but also the outcomes. Each individual artwork was shaped around a story, including the physical process and starting inspirations.

To ensure that the project had a lasting impact in school, the pupils then returned to their classes to share their knowledge amongst their peers. The group even led CPD sessions to walk staff through the intricacies of working with casting materials.



**‘I FELT A HUGE SENSE OF
ACHIEVEMENT AS I WATCHED
THE PUPILS DELIVER THEIR OWN
SKILLS SESSION. LISTENING TO
THEM EXPLAIN EACH STAGE
OF THE PROCESS, WHILE
BEAUTIFULLY EXECUTING EACH
STEP WAS A REAL TESTIMONY
TO THEIR DETERMINATION
THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT.’**

Maisie Maris, Lead Artist



OUTDOOR STAGE BACKDROP

Bygrove Primary School



WHAT HAPPENED?

The starting point for this project was to create an outdoor learning aid that made links with curriculum topics. The artwork would also support teachers in leading storytelling sessions with their pupils and create a backdrop for an outdoor stage.

Amanda Wayne, from design and architecture collective make:good, created an initial banner design to ensure all topic areas were featured. She also led two INSET sessions for teachers, providing step-by-step instructions and resources with which to lead collaging sessions with their pupils.

The school then delivered a whole-school Art Day, where teachers led collage-based workshops with their class groups in the morning, supported by Amanda and artist Diana Phiri-Witty. The collages produced were then photographed and used to create a digital design. A large-scale, weather-proof banner was made and installed to act as a learning aid and backdrop for the outdoor stage-space.

WHO TOOK PART?

This project involved all teachers and pupils from and served as an artistic intervention, which saw the regular timetable collapsed for a full day of art.

OUTCOMES

A large, vinyl banner was produced for the school's outdoor stage. The banner is versatile and continues to be used as an example of how to incorporate curriculum topics creatively and visually across the school.

OUTPUTS

- 2 artist-led INSET sessions in school
- 1 large scale banner for display in school

KEY IMPACT AND LEARNING

This project allowed pupils to work large scale and to understand a design process from start to finish. Teachers were given training, which they then utilised and acted on through leading sessions supported by artists. Consequently, they weren't reliant on external facilitation of the arts, instead artistic approaches were trialled and tested by the teachers themselves. The project also demonstrated how artworks made by pupils could enhance the schools' learning environment, leading to Bygrove commissioning further projects that allowed pupils to contribute to their school surroundings through public commissions.

***"A relentless assault from the skies came
crashing down."***





BUILDING AS STIMULUS

Lansbury Lawrence Primary School



Lansbury Lawrence was built in 1951 as part of the Lansbury Estate and was exhibited as an example of 'Live Architecture' within the Festival of Britain. Designed by F.R.S. Yorke and now Grade II Listed, the building modelled utopian ideals of the types of environments children should learn in, including three original murals by the designer, artist and teacher, Peggy Angus.

The case studies below outline ways we have used Lansbury Lawrence's building and architectural features as a starting point for creative work.

DESIGNER IN RESIDENCE WHAT HAPPENED?

This project provided time for Lansbury Lawrence to better understand and appreciate the heritage of their building and enabled pupils to explore their school environment in a new way. Artist and designer Haidée Drew took residence at Lansbury Lawrence, supporting pupils through a design iteration process in which they produced saleable products inspired by their school building.

The project started with the building and was research-based. Using the school archive, pupils learnt about the historic importance of their school and collected their own resource imagery through photography and sketched

observations around the school site.

This research informed initial designs, with pupils producing drawings for their products based on their own discoveries and choices. The designs included references to architectural features, furnishings, colour and materials from around the school.

'Children were looking at the school in a new way, and created very sophisticated design work as a result.'

Kerri Sellens, specialist art teacher and curriculum lead, Lansbury Lawrence

Haidée then supported pupils to produce moulds of their designs and use coloured jesmonite to produce products – including necklaces, coasters, key rings and candle holders. The pupils went onto sell their work – the Lansbury Presents range - at local Christmas market, Urban Makers East.

'I think the real moment of success for me was when some of the pupils came to the Urban Makers East Fair – it was so wonderful to see the public interact with them, to see their pride and the ultimate, actually selling the work!'

Haidée Drew, Lead Artist

Haidée also shared casting skills with the



teaching staff, which has led to the school continuing to produce cast objects with pupils, demonstrating a lasting legacy of this project.

WHO TOOK PART?

Haidée worked with two Year 5 classes to develop skills in working with jesmonite. Haidée also delivered a CPD for teachers and coordinated for pupils to sell their work at a local makers market.

OUTCOMES

Each pupil made their own individually cast items, inspired by the architecture of the school. The moulds made for the casting have been kept by the school and continue to be used in school's extra-curricular offer. This project served as inspiration for the school to continue to explore their school heritage creatively, with their pupils at the centre of this research.

OUTPUTS

- 1 planning meeting
- 13 artist-led workshops
- 1 introductory CPD for staff
- 1 trip to Urban Makers East

CHANDELIER COMMISSION WHAT HAPPENED?

Bow Arts worked with Haidée Drew to design and fabricate a permanent artwork for the stairwell space at Lansbury Lawrence Primary School, adding a contemporary artwork to the school's historic works.

Following on from the design residency, Haidée then worked from the designs created by pupils to create a sculptural piece to enhance the quality of the environment of the school. The artwork is made of resin pieces and hung in a stairwell by a large window, where it can be viewed internally and externally. The work compliments the Peggy Angus works, and supports the school in developing their environment creatively and sympathetically.

‘Can a school which exhibits permanent works of art promote wellbeing and encourage creative thinking and questioning? This is an area we are keen to build upon at Lansbury Lawrence.’

Kerri Sellens, Lansbury Lawrence Primary School



**‘WHEN CONSOLIDATING MY
THOUGHTS, WHAT CAME
ACROSS WAS THE IMPORTANCE
OF BEING TRUE TO AN ARTIST’S
PRACTICE - IT’S THAT PAIRING
BETWEEN ARTIST AND SCHOOL
AND THE PROJECT BEING
ALIGNED WITH THEIR PRACTICE.
HAIDÉE’S PRACTICE IS ROOTED
IN AN INTEREST IN MODERNIST
ARCHITECTURE – THIS WAS A
FANTASTIC MATCH’**

Kirsty Lowry, former Education Projects Manager, Bow Arts

150 YEAR COMMEMORATION

St Saviour's CE Primary School



WHAT HAPPENED?

Designer maker Sara Heywood was commissioned to make a permanent artwork for the school to celebrate their 150th anniversary.

The aim of the project was to create an interactive artwork for the school that referenced its history. The school had retained a wealth of objects and archival material from the original site on Northumbria Street. The old building, which was destroyed by Nazi bombs in the Blitz, was designed in the typical Victorian Gothic style.

Sara used this content and collected stories from the school and local community to inform the final design. Using found items and furniture, she replicated the aesthetic of a Victorian classroom in homage to pupils and staff from days past.

The artwork now sits proudly in the corridor, allowing for hands-on exploration of artefacts from the history of the school. It is also used for a range of activities – as a space for the pupils to write stories, poems or prayers and to share their thoughts and memories of the school.

WHO TOOK PART?

Sara took on the role of design consultant

and met with a wide range of members of the school and local community to ensure that the artwork was as representative as possible.

Sara also asked for the input of pupils and staff to ensure that she was creating something productive for the learning environment, testing out concepts and materials on small steering groups of pupils from across the school.

OUTCOMES

Sara designed and produced a bespoke installation inspired by a Victorian school, including displays of artefacts from the history of the school.

OUTPUTS

- 1 planning and consultation meeting
- 5 artist studio days for design and fabrication
- 1 teacher CPD

‘The best art display I’ve seen in a school in 25 years of teaching.’

Classteacher feedback

KEY IMPACT AND LEARNING

The aim of this project was to develop an artwork that celebrated the legacy of the school and opened up children’s eyes to how a professional artist might use everyday items to create something vibrant and exciting.

Whilst the work took the form of an artist-led commission, the challenge was for Sara to immerse herself in both learning environments, past and present. To achieve this, Sara worked visibly within the school on each stage of the project – sorting content adjacent to the proposed artwork site – and using pupils and staff as a sound board for ideas in anecdotal conversations across the day.

Both pupils and staff witnessed the development of the artwork – from the project’s infancy to its installation and unveiling. This wholesale understanding of

the stages involved on a commission has led to a real tangible sense of ownership felt by the pupils. In its own way, it has secured its own legacy in the history of the school.

‘The interactive display brings the school’s rich history to life for our pupils and visitors alike and provides many valuable learning experiences.’

Andrew Rowland, Art Coordinator,
St Saviour’s CE Primary School

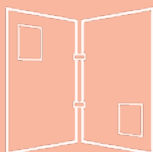


**‘THE ENTIRE SCHOOL
SEEMED TO BE
REALLY ENTHUSED AND
EXCITED ABOUT THE
PROJECT AND LEARNED A
GREAT DEAL ABOUT THE
HISTORY OF THEIR OWN
SCHOOL AND HOW AN
ARTIST MIGHT WORK WITH
THE ARTEFACTS TO CREATE
A PERMANENT
INSTALLATION FOR THE
SCHOOL.’**

Sara Heywood, Lead Artist

LEARNING JOURNEYS IN MATHS

Stebon Primary School



WHAT HAPPENED?

Learning Journeys in Maths saw artist and illustrator Mark Oliver plan and design an immersive mural for the school. The aim of the project was to create an artwork with a lasting legacy; one which visually represented the school's unique approach to teaching maths – and providing a soft stimulus for pupils to continue their maths learning as they navigate the school building.

Mark began by observing each year group in their maths lessons. He produced a series of 'live illustrations' to capture the practical, play-based learning that takes place in the classroom each day. These illustrations would provide the narrative for the mural's final design – telling the story of a pupil's academic journey through school.

Mark then worked with pupils to create their own visual representations. He led cut paper illustration workshops to showcase how collage might be used to communicate themes in abstract terms. Each class were designated a number as a focus for the activities and were encouraged to find creative design solutions to represent the information and concepts behind the number.

Mark then worked with a small steering group of pupils and staff to review the content

and to make decisions about what to include in the final designs. They refined artworks from both the observation and workshop sessions for use across ten distinct panels.

'It looks fab! We are really thrilled with the outcomes.'

Jeremy Iver, Head Teacher, Stebon Primary School

WHO TOOK PART?

To ensure that the artwork was as representative as possible, Mark worked across each key stage to get a sense of how children interpret maths investigations. Working with full classes from Years 2, 4 and 6, Mark encouraged pupils to generate artworks, which are included in the final designs.

OUTCOMES

Mark designed a maths-focused mural artwork for the school. Ten panels make up the mural that are displayed across a branching number line, which travels the length of the main stairway in the school.

OUTPUTS

- 1 planning meeting
- 6 artist-led workshops in-school
- 1 permanent mural artwork

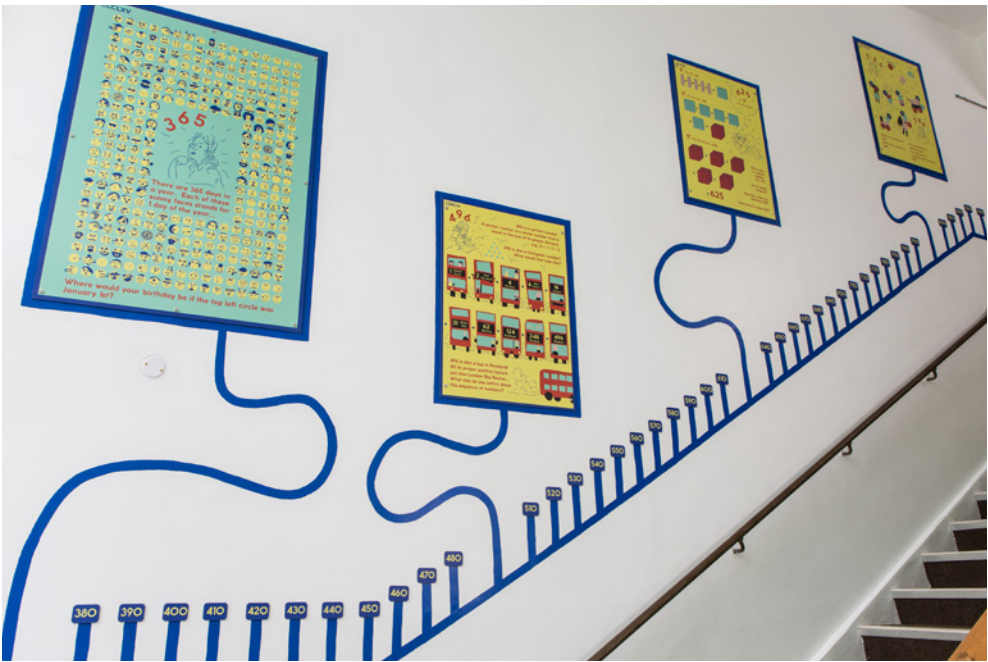
KEY IMPACT AND LEARNING

The main challenge with Learning Journeys in Maths was bringing together pedagogy in maths and illustration in a coherent whole for the pupils. The starting point for the project was always to have a number line from 0-1000 – but the decisions around how (and where) to populate it with artworks relied on a number of in-school experts.

The decision was made to focus on numbers that had both demonstrable visual inspirations and maths concepts behind them. For example, the number two evokes imagery such as reflections, bicycles and butterflies, as well as concepts such as pairs, doubling and binary trees. Mark then introduced collage to encourage the children to playfully explore these ideas. We found that this method of creating artworks in an open-ended free-form process was in keeping with the philosophy of how learning takes place at Stebon.

Prior to the design process, Mark worked with a select group to ensure that the final designs were as representative as possible of the project learning and discoveries. Working with a mixed group of pupils and staff ensured that there was a level of ownership behind the artwork school-wide.

These pupils and staff continue to act as ambassadors for the work to this day. The mural is also bookended by two blackboards providing spaces for open-ended maths enquiry.



DIGITAL ANIMATION

Wellington Primary School



WHAT HAPPENED?

The starting point for Digital Makers was the desire to introduce children to contemporary artistic practice and new media. Multimedia artist Jojo Hynes was given the brief to creatively interpret curriculum topics through a range of digital media including stop motion animation and sound recording software. Jojo worked with two Year 5 classes and staff to ensure that this approach would continue to be used independently post-project.

‘I found Keezy really easy! I liked that I was in charge of making the soundtrack for our animations!’

Pupil feedback

Jojo introduced stop motion, animation and sound recording, and challenged pupils to create work in response to their class topics of Egyptians and the Water Cycle. The group was given time to gain familiarity with the associated equipment and processes, keeping a record of their progress and creating ‘How To’ guides as a tool to share their learning across the school.

Using these principles, pupils created small-scale sets using card, clay and paper. They then worked collaboratively to develop

storyboards to provide a narrative to their topics. The completed animations represent the ideas and discoveries across the project, with pupils responsible for their concept and design.

WHO TOOK PART?

The school was keen to place pupils at the centre of their learning of new digital media. Two Year 5 classes were chosen to take part in the project, building digital skills using a range of apps and then sharing their knowledge and understanding school-wide.

OUTCOMES

Jojo worked with pupils to design, make and produce two digital animations to represent their termly topics of the Egyptians and the Water Cycle. The completed animations were displayed in the school reception.

OUTPUTS

- 6 artist-led workshops
- 2 artist studio days for editing and animation production
- 1 ‘How To’ video produced
- 2 digital animations produced

KEY IMPACT AND LEARNING

Pupils gained practical skills in experimenting with animation, stop motion and sound recording. These processes were initiated by Jojo, who worked with the school's IT lead to prepare the tools and equipment for the sessions, as well as staff, to ensure that applications were understood and that the confidence was there to embed them across the curriculum.

Their teamwork skills also increased which could be evidenced in their soundtracks and voice overs.'

Jojo Hynes, Lead Artist

'Students were very interested in improving their work and were proud to show it to the whole school.



**‘I HAVE LEARNT HOW TO
MAKE A SET WITH CLAY FOR
STOP MOTION ANIMATION
AND WHEN YOU DO
ANIMATION YOU HAVE TO
DO IT 12 FRAMES PER
SECOND’**

Pupil, Wellington Primary School



ON COLLABORATION

Ben Jones, Creative Arts Lead Mayflower Primary School

I was at a meeting with other art teachers from across London a few years ago and came across the idea of arts / cultural ambassadors – a group of pupils from across the school that work to raise the profile of the arts. I thought about how I could introduce this back at Mayflower and the following year began with the first cohort. One of our initial projects was to work with Bow Arts to improve a neglected area of the playground. We visited other parts of London for inspiration, collected ideas from children across the school and worked with an artist to plan and present ideas to the Headteacher and a company who would design and make the final installation.

The project was successful because pupils took a leadership role and controlled the direction and outcomes. Whilst the project was in progress, art leads from each of the Poplar Partnership schools met to discuss and share ideas. As a result of this, other schools began to introduce arts ambassadors and we began to discuss how the different groups work and have an impact in each setting. We are now exploring the possibilities of working together on joint projects.

This is an example of the power of collaboration between other teachers, schools and organisations. It is unlikely I would have come up with the idea of cultural ambassadors myself, but through the sharing of ideas something bigger and more powerful happened.

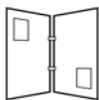
Schools can often exist in bubbles, struggling to implement new policies and initiatives that are dictated from above at a local and national level. Although it is doubtful that this will ever change dramatically, I believe that when schools collaborate, innovative and creative ways of working can emerge. There is also something powerful about teachers – the people who are in the classroom working with children every day – developing new projects and initiatives which are then shared and fed back up the system to Head Teachers and beyond.

So why involve outside organisations and individuals? My experience has always been that they can provide new perspectives and ideas that would never have been contemplated within the school. Working with artists who instinctively problem solve,

make new connections and work creatively can be invaluable when beginning to devise new projects.

When I think back to times when I tried doing something new, changed my approach or raised my ambitions for a project, it was usually as a result of a conversation with a colleague, whether they were a teacher, artist or other professional. Collaborating with other teachers at like-minded schools has certainly pushed me to do things I would not have contemplated in isolation.





THE ART ROOM

Atlanta Duffy, Art, Design and Technology Lead,
Stebon Primary School

I've never wanted the art room to be an island. Fostering synergy between art room and classroom and creating a dynamic environment intrinsic to wider school life have been my main aims.

Last year, two Year 4 boys insisted that they must make a ship out of flotsam they'd found under an art room cupboard. Both boys often find core subject learning challenging but shone as chief design engineers to an ever-growing team keen to spend lunch times helping to realise this child-led initiative. The finished structure, a highly imaginative catamaran designed to operate over land and sea, was celebrated in a whole school assembly. The boys have since become Cultural Ambassadors for the school and whisperings suggest the next grand idea is hatching.

Frequently messy, often noisy, sometimes chaotic, the art room resembled a working studio. 'Departments' formed naturally as children worked to express a particular interest or skill. Active communication occurred between those

departments as ideas were explored or discarded, reworked and refined. Within a fast-changing environment, facilitating the children's ideas and the unexpected avenues that opened up required an approach that involved both standing back and in-the-moment, hands-on participation.

As well as encapsulating what a dynamic art room looks like, the experience had echoes of one I'd had as an Artist Educator with Bow Arts. In each case, the projects depended on the children tapping into a broad range of previous experiences that had provided access to a rich variety of materials, tools and processes. Both centred on design through making and child autonomy. Similarly, in a wonderfully led after-school Art Club, it is fascinating to witness children develop their ideas and interests still further: utilising and adapting experiences they've had through Art/Design and Technology lessons and making them their own.

Over four years, well-resourced art room projects have been developed to complement thematic classroom learning and build on skills, knowledge and understanding. The best come close to that described above and are strengthened through collaboration with teaching colleagues.

If rich enough, and given time and space to breathe, such projects develop their own momentum towards innovation and a tangible sense of ownership for the children. Time and space also factor in developing dynamic working relationships with visiting

experts. Be they outside practitioners or parents and carers, the skills, experience and different approaches they bring enliven the teaching and learning environment.







VALUING CREATIVE LEARNING

Kerri Sellens, Art Specialist and Curriculum Lead, Lansbury
Lawrence Primary School

With the creative industries being one of the fastest growing sectors of the UK economy, having young children regularly working with creative professionals and organisations is essential to help inspire and develop an understanding of the arts being the foundation of many different career paths. Arts Council England's recent Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case report shows under-representation of people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds currently working within arts organisations. Over 92% of our children at Lansbury Lawrence are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and for all of our children we actively seek opportunities to engage them creatively and encourage ambition.

Our school is in the Lansbury ward of Poplar, Tower Hamlets. Within Tower Hamlets, the highest percentage of working age people who are employment deprived is within the Lansbury ward (Deprivation in Tower Hamlets. Analysis of the 2015 Indices of Deprivation data, Tower Hamlets Council, Corporate Strategy and Equality Service | Corporate Research Unit.) Developing

our links, connections and relationships with creative and cultural organisations has been a key focus of our curriculum, both to nurture creative learning opportunities and also engage our whole community. We are proud of our commitment to the arts, the experiences we provide for our children and families, and of our status as an Artsmark Gold school.

Our relationship with Bow Arts has been an integral part of our creative vision over the past five years, and has enabled us to plan several ambitious learning experiences for our children. Developing a long-term relationship with a cultural organisation allows each stakeholder to become familiar with each other and the project outcomes become increasingly fine-tuned and focussed. Each year is the next stage of the journey, and it is always exciting.

We have used our school building and grounds as a starting point for several of our creative projects. It is brilliant to watch artists and designers respond to Lansbury Lawrence, inspiring our children and

teachers to look at their surroundings in a new way. Re-interpreting our surroundings into different forms develops abstract thought and encourages individual expression, while working with our school building is purposeful and relevant to our children, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging. Our school is culturally important, having been built as part of the Lansbury Estate for the Festival of Britain Live Architecture Exhibition in 1951, and it is important that we teach our children about this history through our curriculum.

At Lansbury Lawrence, 87% of our children have English as an Additional Language. Access to creative learning experiences, with opportunities to make, helps to develop our children's communication skills and visual literacy. Our children have experienced cross-curricular hands-on learning, developing cooperation, collaboration and communication. As we have progressed with more ambitious creative learning experiences our children's subject specific vocabulary has grown.

Our most recent Bow Arts project is being led by our pupil Arts Council, who, through working with professional designers have collaborated to produce a creative resource, inspired by our environment, which our Early Years children will be able to use for

years to come. The cross-phase Arts Council investigated what the Early Years children needed, what they are curious about, and what would help them to learn creatively.

Through these projects, we are engaging our children through purpose; developing imagination, self-esteem and confidence. Improving fine motor and critical thinking skills, and helping to prepare our children for whatever they choose to do in their future lives. Collaborating and creating networks with cultural organisations is a crucial part of this vision.





ARTISTS IN SCHOOLS

Laura Coates, Art Coordinator,
Woolmore Primary School

I have been a teacher for a while now but aside from classifying myself as a teacher I also classify myself as a creative person. That is not to say I visit galleries all the time – I don't, nor that I have an art degree – I don't. But I do enjoy the little items I make on my sewing machine or at ceramics class every Thursday, mainly because I cherish the time I have to myself when I am making and, furthermore, I can actually say that I am proud of myself for the creations I produce.

When I went into teaching I relished the idea that I could embark upon inspiring children to be creative in order to gain the therapy and fulfilment of happiness that comes after having created something. However, I spend far more time teaching children to chant sight words or blend and segment phonemes, rather than enjoying the process of experimentation and creation at the art table. I am not disregarding the importance of teaching a child to read, but more the time and processes by which we go about teaching the skills of reading. Yes, children need skills to blend and segment to physically read words on a page but they also need the experiences, discussions and experiments that come through creative processes to equip them

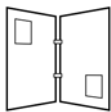
with the ability to interpret, comprehend and understand written texts.

That is why bringing artists into school is so valuable. For those periods, creativity is at the forefront of a crowded curriculum. For that slither of time the children get to immerse themselves into something that they will not be tested on, not be judged by and not fail at. They will be involved in an open-ended process that will encourage them to draw upon ideas, thoughts and skills they have begun to build up in their own lives, and from which they can apply to other learning.

It is not just the refocusing on creativity that is valuable when artists work in schools, but also the transfer of power from myself as class teacher onto the artist that allows me to become a student again. I get to learn alongside my children! The children enjoy seeing me in this way, more relaxed, happy and free from the, sometimes laborious, leadership that comes with my job. I'm not saying I dislike my job in any way, in fact quite the opposite, but I'm sure I am not the only teacher who doesn't relish in a little time to be a learner too.

In addition, the artist is able to deliver the creative sessions in a much more authentic way than if I was to lead it. It is so important for children to engage with a variety of adults, from artists to scientists and everyone in between in order to expand their horizons and inspire them. I alone as their class teacher am not enough to do this. The day the artist comes into the classroom may be a turning point in a child's life in which they are inspired to apply their new creative, open-minded thinking in order to tackle exciting challenges, which in turn will open up new opportunities in their life, whatever they may be. I think that is pretty remarkable!





EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND LETTING GO

This conversation between Caroline De Souza (Art Coordinator) and Atlanta Duffy (Art Teacher and former Bow Arts Educator) focuses on the alignment of Bow Arts projects with the learning pedagogy at Stebon Primary School. The conversation explores themes of teacher as facilitator, collaboration, process-led and experiential learning processes. The interview was conducted by Lucy Wheeler, Education Project Manager, Bow Arts.

LW: If you were to choose three words to describe your art programme at Stebon, what might they be?

AD: Exciting

CDS: Collaborative

AD: Discovering stuff

LW: Why those three things?

AD: There's a balance to be struck, between teaching a set of skills and letting the children explore and take it further. A balance between teaching a set of skills whilst allowing children to make their own discoveries.

CDS: We have a creative curriculum – Art, Music, Drama are incorporated in our English, Maths. This initiates possibility thinking – anything can happen. When children are able to explore and run with something, and they then feel really empowered, collaboration happens. These are magical moments, where the children take over from the teacher, who facilitates. That's when it becomes really exciting.

LW: Can we pause on the word ‘facilitator’ – how would you describe your approach to facilitation?

CDS: If you have got amazing relationships with your pupils, you set really high expectations and you give them a set of tools. These elements come together and the children lead the learning. We have that mind-set at Stebon. Teachers encourage a growth mind-set where you can make mistakes and try again. You work with your peers, but also with your team of adults – that atmosphere enables creativity to happen.

AD: Listening to Caroline made me think of this in action. Year 5 are in the middle of making their pots inspired by Ancient Greek vases. The process is building up the skills needed over a three-week period. They then cross a threshold – they are going into the realm of experts. This is a really marvellous way of working, where I can move on from teaching certain skills and facilitate their ideas. They have built up skills in order to then make creative decisions. It’s a sophisticated set of skills that have been built up.

LW: I am interested in the bit before you get to that ‘expert’ realm. I often see there not being enough time given over to allowing time for skills development.

AD: Skills take time – for us all. You need time to build them up and then apply them properly.

CDS: The children can then teach each other. We have found that that is far more powerful.

AD: Not only that, but they seem to better understand! I can say it until I’m blue in the face but the child will somehow say it and strangely they all understand.

CDS: There’s this catalyst of constantly thinking, doing, making, trialling, error – try again, which is applicable to all subjects. They are life skills. Pupils become more confident, more articulate. They are using their brains and their hands – making with their hands.



AD: Yes – our art projects are long-term. Starting at research and ideas – drawing ideas – to starting to make, build up those skills, to innovate. I can build up those skills to then make decisions. And just look at those pots, they are all different shapes and sizes – all completely different. They have made decisions and there are reasons behind that decision-making.

LW: There seems to be confidence to allow mistakes?

CDS: We encourage that. There isn't always this final, perfect product. You find your direction, that's what we aim to give children the confidence to do.

LW: And this synergy of being across the curriculum seems powerful, i.e. this doesn't just happen in the art-room?

CDS: Children help to create their own spaces. That integration – like Music and Drama in an English lesson, Art in Maths – those skills are constantly moving around – it's just what

they do.

LW: Can I ask a bit more about the learning environments you provide? We are in this amazing art room – a dedicated room for making. What difference does this space make?

AD: I think the most important thing is its adaptability. We can clear the space and have no tables and chairs and work on the floor. I have everything I need – all materials – around me. In the middle of the lesson I can change tact and I can just get stuff out – making the process very, very fluid. If you didn't have this, you would be stuck with what you had planned – but your plans change.

CDS: The children also know where everything is – they are free to take things when they need it. It adds to an atmosphere of creativity and learning.

AD: You need space to make stuff! You need physical space. Like all studios, it needs to be adaptable.

LW: I want to ask about the consortia. It's in its fifth year – why do Stebon continue to want to be part of the programme?

AD: For me its communicating and collaborating with my peers across the consortia. Otherwise I spend too much time in my own head. My own head is pretty good, but sometimes I need to get out of it! Being a member of the consortium allows the opportunity to exchange

CDS: To share ideas –

AD: Yes – I've helped Kerri [Lansbury Lawrence], Kerri has helped me – that is marvellous. Communication, support, getting out of one's own head – in other words getting new ideas.

CDS: I like the way Bow Arts bring us all together. We can be so busy and lost in what we are doing. I find that schools are like mini islands – we get so involved in what we are doing that we don't branch out. Having those meetings where we sit for an afternoon and share ideas, experiences and things that schools are working on, such as the Arts Mark. A year ago, I was really nervous about embarking on [Arts Mark], it seemed so daunting – but we did it through Bow Arts. Without that support, I wouldn't have had the confidence to get going with it. We now have this direction of where we want to take art and what the next steps are.

AD: I would like to add and emphasise that Bow Arts has been a catalyst to up the amount of experts in-school and getting the children out to visit studio spaces. Bow Arts is a great resource for that.

LW: For me this is one of the most valuable things we can provide as an organisation – being able to bring children and young people into an artists' studio environment and just seeing somebody working through something –

CDS: and what artists actually do –

AD: This is really important. I talk to the children all the time about this – whether its 'right mathematicians' or 'right scientists' or 'right artists or engineers' – I approach this room as a working studio, because, I suppose that's the background I come from.

LW: Can you unpack that, Atlanta – approaching this room as a studio?

AD: It's finding stuff out. You trial, you test. Stuff goes wrong and you discover more stuff. Sometimes you work quietly on your own, sometimes you work with someone else. When you were asking 'what's special about the art room' – it's that.

LW: There's a similarity to a studio practice, for sure

AD: Studios are sometimes a bit messy – and that's ok

CDS: Children often think that everything has to be neat and perfect – and art needs to be this final outcome. But actually all the messiness is the process you need – this can often be more exciting than the finished piece.

LW: What do you then think artists can bring to school settings?

CDS: Their real life experiences. Children get to work with people they don't usually interact with every day. This is a tight community that may not venture far outside of Poplar, so exposing children to difference. Every year we are doing more ambitious projects. Last year we started the cultural ambassadors programme. We used P4C [Philosophy for Children], and had a number of different artists coming in – a whole fusion of different experiences. This year we are building on that and doing an even more ambitious project. Pupils will work with artists and musicians to create a live event at a local venue.

LW: This exploratory model seems unique to Stebon – and the way you are choosing to utilise artist skills. It's experimental, you don't know where you are going to get to in the end

CDS: It's risk-taking. I pitched our latest project to our Head – I said you won't see this final outcome as a piece of work that you can display – but it's an experience for the children – that's the outcome that you will then see. I said – are you ok with that?! And he said yeah – that is our next step.

AD: It is a step beyond creating a certain 'thing' for the school, which we have done in the past. This is much more experiential.

CDS: The way artists lead sessions is exciting for the children. A couple of years ago at Bygrove [another consortium school] we did a storytelling project where we then produced a piece of animation. The artist came in, cleared away the tables and so the children just worked on the floor. The children hadn't had an experience like this before, and they were all hooked; there was no behaviour issues because

they were so engrossed in what they were doing. Bow Arts said ‘throw away the tables and chairs’ – and the children were so into it – the outcomes are fantastic and experimental. It’s something about creativity and chaos and that freedom given. Bow Artists give you that. It’s out of the mould of the school environment. Its letting go. You see some children come out of their boxes – and it’s these moments – say a conversation with this child and the artist where you just step back and listen – that’s brilliant.

AD: I’ve heard more children this year say ‘I feel like a real artist’. It’s made me fly.

LW: You mentioned stepping back, letting go – and not knowing where a project goes – that’s something that might make some people uncomfortable?

CDS: It can, and it might be that you feel restrained by the curriculum. But there are pockets of time where you can let go. By giving children these moments, it builds trust, collaboration, thrill, excitement. The knock-on impact of this then trickles into the everyday running of your classroom and then again this builds a relationship between adult and children and children and children. And it’s also good to say to the children ‘I’m not sure where this might go’ and suddenly they relax – you are admitting you are vulnerable and not necessary the expert.

LW: It’s a leveller-

CDS: As a teacher you need to trust yourself and your judgement and also trust your class. They then see you not as a figure who knows everything, but that you are trying your best.



BEING CURIOUS AND BREAKING CONVENTION

Siodhna O’Dowd (Art Coordinator – Wellington Primary School) talks with Aidan Adams and Lucy Wheeler (Bow Arts Education Project Managers) about the importance of process, cultivating curiosity and involving the wider school community in arts initiatives.

LW: What do you feel the consortium has brought to Wellington?

SO: The nature of working in schools is that it’s usually structure, routine – it’s quite frustrating because art in school ends up being more design as everything has to have a finished outcome – but you want children to explore their own creativity and that’s what Bow Arts does in this school. Children work as artists rather than just replicating another artist’s work.

AA: Maybe having artists working in those ways, taking different angles with the curriculum frees us up to work a bit more expansively. Last year with Jojo I thought that was a particular stand-out project [see Wellington case study], we were interpreting topics but doing it using digital processes and techniques. It was almost team-taught, that relationship was really deep in terms of spreading that knowledge and I think that was reflected in the exhibition.

LW: How was Jojo able to work alongside the teachers, how did that collaboration take place?

SO: It really leant itself well to group work – it was a collaborative project, not just in how the children worked but how the adults worked too. It’s so valuable for the children to see teachers learning alongside them because they are usually looking to you as the expert but through life we are continually expanding and learning ourselves, so for them to see that and to realise that most of the jobs we are preparing them for don’t even exist yet.



LW: And the pupils involved – they were then teaching others?

SO: They created a ‘how to’ video which I then used when I delivered a training workshop to all of the staff, which was brilliant because we basically condensed what we did over eight days into a two-hour session with the children teaching us. They were really proud to be teaching their teachers, we showed it to governors and they were really impressed. It was really nice for them to feel important.

LW: In your role as Art Coordinator and the experience you’ve had being part of the Poplar Consortium what do you feel you have taken from it personally or professionally?

SO: Personally I have found it really exciting and really inspiring because it has been my first leadership role. It’s been nice having other creatives and arts leads to talk to about how we do different things and having that support, especially in terms of Artsmark and bouncing ideas off each other in projects. We’re all looking at ideas of play recently and you can see how the projects have evolved over the years, you figure out what works and

what doesn't.

LW: Did you know the other coordinators before the project?

SO: No, it's been valuable in terms of networking and it's great because I have been in contact by email about arts related things over the last few years. The fact that Bow Arts facilitates those coordinator meetings and it's not just sitting down and looking at skills, we can actually meet each other as human beings and talk about our own interests and strengths which is not always possible. When you have meetings in school it's always thinking about a certain outcome rather than embracing what you already have and how you can share and collaborate.

AA: I think just booking your time out is making a statement that your time is needed for this. I think there's a bit of a recognition, you are the ones responsible for all of the achievements of the consortium, it's just about reminding Headteachers and senior leaders that we need that time with you.

SO: I think personally I'm a lot more confident because of the consortium, having that supportive network and an opportunity to use my strengths, work in different ways, work with different artists – I'm learning so much as well so it's really valuable.

LW: So continuing from that and thinking about ambition, how do you feel that confidence comes across because you talked about doing a very ambitious project last year. So when you're thinking about what you could do for your next project, how has that thought process changed since you've been in the role?

SO: I think it's knowing that you can have this amazing process in mind instead of just thinking about the outcome. Actually just being open to change, not quite as fixed on the outcomes. Having a focus on process, trusting in that and valuing that more than outcome just changed that mind-set.

AA: They're not mutually exclusive, I think is what we've found in working together, it's

not either process or outcome, it's somewhere on the spectrum. Even if we have quite a clear end point in sight it's about us trying to invest our time in the journey to that point, building in creative ways to achieve that as well.

LW: For you what stands out about being involved in a programme like the consortium for five years?

SO: What really stands out is the confidence of the children. I've been in the school seven years now and you can really see how skilled they are. Initially it was all focussed on drawing skills but now they're doing bespoke projects that teachers wouldn't have the time to do and there is that time there every week, it's not just at the end of term. The children get really excited about it and it trickles down into other subjects and other ways of thinking.

LW: I guess it's challenging in the current climate with the arts curricular to negotiate this time and ensure that's still possible?

SO: It is about making those links and teaching cross-curriculum and having the confidence to say this is important and they need to try. We're big into growth mind-set in this school which is really good, getting them to embrace making mistakes, experimenting, learning what doesn't work and why, helping them to formulate opinions about why one material is better than another – there's so much value in that.

LW: I just wondered about the fact that we have the celebration event, something that brings everybody together and we get to see the children on the day but we don't necessarily hear all of the conversations back in school or hear what the parents say. I wonder what impact the professionalising of children's artwork has?

SO: It's always positive, the children are always really excited. I think especially with the parents we work with, a lot of them won't have ever been to a gallery or an exhibition so they can really see the value in it. I think as well because it's a select few children and they're getting the chance to collaborate with their peers from other schools it's really valuable.

And there are always lots of parents of the children really keen to come – the parents were really getting involved and saying ‘wow I wish we had the opportunity to do this when we were children.’ One of the parents was really sad that they had to move on to the next art activity, she just wanted to finish her artwork! I think it’s really valuable for them to work with their children and perhaps take some of that home. I think personally getting the parents involved in the making so they can understand why the children are so excited and they can get excited with them, go through that together, I think it’s a good way in.



ADVOCATING FOR CREATIVITY FROM THE GROUND UP

Bow Arts Education Project Manager Lucy Wheeler talks to Ben Jones (Creative Arts Lead, Mayflower Primary School) and Kerri Sellens (Art Specialist and Curriculum Lead, Lansbury Lawrence Primary School) about testing, being ambitious and grass-roots ambition in the classroom and beyond. Both Ben and Kerri are part of the A New Direction Advocates Programme.

LW: You met in a Bow Arts meeting – do you think it's the shared meetings and opportunities carved out for teachers to work collaboratively that keeps your respective schools signing up for the consortia?

KS: It's a bonus, we have a really good network here. But for us [at Lansbury] its more because of the outcomes of projects. Bow Arts is very well organised, very well resourced, very well connected with artists you work with – you bring something we can't do ourselves, that's why we carry on.

BJ: I think it's also the opportunity for children to exhibit work outside of school which is important – to share with those outside of the school.

KS: Yes, and that it's local. Having the schools come together – there are always cousins, neighbours – they all know each other from across the community, which we [the Poplar schools] haven't done independently.

BJ: For me, the meetings spark ideas. When we have that chance to share our projects, what we are thinking about doing – it always sparks ideas. Like the project that we did last year was from what Kerri had done before – casting with an enterprise element – I wanted to use some of those ideas and build on them.

KS: And hearing that you have established an ambassadors programme – and this year we

are initiating our school Arts Council

BJ: There's a lot of cross-over. The same with Artsmark, too. Many of the [consortia] schools are in the process of being or applying to be an Artsmark school and we all share the process and resources.

LW: Have you had to push for art to have sufficient time within the curriculum?

KS: No – we're lucky here. The leadership here are really behind art.

BJ: I guess I am always thinking about the wider curriculum and further opportunities we can bring – such as visiting exhibitions, performing, to share. Over the last five years that's something I have realised. Children should be doing art in school, but also doing projects that are extra curricular.

LW: How do the bespoke projects sit alongside your curriculum planning – are they aligned, or separate?

KS: It depends on the project. This year's project will develop our Arts Council as leaders. It's not, then, particularly curriculum driven, but, you could say it's Design Technology. Last year's guide was curriculum linked. Screen-printing for Year 6 is something I wanted to offer, but wouldn't have been possible in classes of 30. It was a good opportunity then for the artist to work with small groups – I think strategically and creatively of how I can fulfil what I would like to see that year group to develop – what skills could an artist bring?

BJ: Last year's project [see casting case study] was about our Artsmark case study and how I wanted to develop leadership and pupil voice – so it was about raising the profile and children having a voice in the art that happens at school.

LW: Is coming up with a starting point for the project the most exciting bit?

KS: Yes, because I know with Bow Arts that I can be ambitious. I know we'll meet and it will



be fulfilled. We can find a solution. So, it is exciting and I don't hold back.

LW: Do you think you have become more ambitious, or always had high expectations of what could be possible?

KS: Yes – but I think that Bow Arts develops really good relationships with schools, so I feel that I can be more ambitious with you. That relationship is really strong. So maybe year on year it does make me more confident.

LW: It's motivating for us as Project Managers to get to know the context of the schools we are working in. You better understand how you might approach a project based on the setting.

KS: We work with lots of external agencies and we would love to develop relationships with them further, but often we can't. With Bow Arts its quite consistent, it does feels like a relationship.

BJ: I guess for you and Aidan, you know how far you can go with certain schools. I would feel like I would appreciate you being able to come and say, 'I have had this great idea based on that conversation we had – how about we go out there and try this'. I feel like that conversation works really well. I have definitely been more ambitious. I think about the first project in the consortium, which was creating a Chinese dragon, which was linked to our curriculum. Really it was simple – but then it builds and builds – like last year with pupil voice and then this year planning for teachers. They are very different to 'let's have something nice in the school to showcase what we are doing'.

LW: What have artists brought to your school settings?

KS: They are professionals to inspire the children. It's always lovely to hear about their days – and I am often jealous! Haidée Drew sticks in my mind. She was really inspiring to work around – her professionalism, her finish and expectations of the children was really inspiring. The skills and passions they have, such as Joe Lyward bringing in his and other

illustrators' work, is inspiring to the children.

BJ: There is something about being an artist and having that creative mind and being able to think in a very open way about stuff that doesn't necessarily happen in schools. That's been some of the focus of our project this year: how can we get teachers to open up their outlook and not think about outcomes. So much of school is about what we want the children to produce and how do we get them to that point. Artists can offer an alternative, rooted around process and being comfortable in not knowing. Allowing time to explore and refine. For our project this year we are predominantly doing CPD and that's the thing about having the artists there for me: if it was me running it, I would still feel like I had that school mind-set that is can be quite closed at times. Artists can really open ideas out.

LW: The way that the art curriculum is set out for primary, do you think this can be quite daunting for teachers who don't have a background in art?

BJ/KS – Yes.

LW: Whenever I read the curriculum, especially in primary, there are some statements, like 'mastery in drawing' or something – it's very daunting language.

KS: Yes, and it's quite subjective

LW: There is an element of control that can take place because of this – i.e. we will all copy a Picasso, for example – with every work looking the same. How can you go back a couple of steps here?

BJ: I think it's about process. I think also, a lot of things happening in schools now are about teachers taking a step back and allowing the children to take it where they want to take it. That's what P4C (Philosophy for Children) does. I think its saying – you are already doing this when you are facilitating a discussion. You are letting the children lead things and take it where they want it to go – and that's what you can do in art.

LW: I think it's more daunting when it's something visual.

KS: But I think some people say 'I can't do maths' and some people say 'I can't do art' – it's one of those fears. Teachers are only taught art for around two hours on their PGCE – it's not a long time. If it's not a passion, a hobby or interest or something that's particularly in their world then it is daunting and scary. Then you go on TES and find a lesson plan. Which will be Van Gogh sunflowers.

LW: I get very frustrated when I only see white, European male artists being studied on the curriculum!

BJ: Yes! I must say there is a big effort at our school to make sure there are women artists being studied and it's not just dead artists.

KS: Ours the same.

LW: What has stood out for you over the five years?

KS: Loads! I've loved all of it! I think the legacy. That a lot of the projects have been things that carry on. The guide is something we can use; we still use the casts Haidée left with us.

LW: And with Lansbury Lawrence, what interested me when I first came is that Haidée was so interested in the heritage of the school. Was this something that kick-started how you explore your school environment creatively, or was this happening already?

KS: A little bit, but the project really complimented it. She was the artist that really connected with it the most. It has inspired me since to look closely at my environment. Of course there's the [Peggy Angus] tiles, but actually looking at the architectural features throughout the building inspired me. Now I lead all curriculum, so I changed one of the Year 5 learning themes to Festival of Britain, so that we can delve deeper into our building's heritage.

BJ: For me, it's also those longer relationships with artists – like Ania, we've kept in contact – I've invited her to work on other projects and keep those relationships continuing. And especially with all of the Bow Arts staff – it feels like a very reciprocal thing. I've delivered public sessions with Bow Arts, you've supported me with the contemporary arts resource I am in the process of developing. I really like the to-and-fro relationship. It's not just 'we are going to come in and provide something for you.'

LW: It's great when artists have revisited the schools they have worked in. I remember Haidée saying how nice it was to come back in to be interviewed for the guide project. Often as an artist you do a project but don't get to come back in and see how these projects have settled. It's reciprocal for the artists we work with, too.

KS: And for the pupils they see artists then not just as someone whose passing by – there's more of a connection.

LW: What have you taken away personally and professionally from the programme?

BJ: It's given me leadership opportunities – like leading that session in Margate, I think it's helped grow my ambition for what I want art to be like at our school.

LW: Can you unpack what you mean?

BJ: Those conversations with Aidan when we are thinking about a project – I never work that well on my own, I always work better with people and like we said, the ambition always seems to grow through those conversations.

KS: I think similar for me – you've helped to facilitate and support the wider arts network – I worked in Hackney before here, so when I joined this group the meetings were a great way to get to know everyone. Now I feel quite at home.

BJ: I think it's been easier, because we've been in the same roles for a long time, which

allows you to develop relationships, where staff changes can make this quite hard. I think what's good about it is that all partners are teachers and that we are the people coming up with the ideas. Yes, we have to get sign-off. But it's about teachers doing stuff together – and that is what makes the real difference. Rather than Bow Arts going to the Headteachers with an idea which get trickled down to teachers. It's stronger because it's from the ground up.

LW: That can underestimate what is already happening within the school – it can be a bit 'make and take'. I feel more comfortable starting with those who will be teaching. You have both been going outside of your schools and giving public talks, panel discussions – is that something you saw yourself doing five years ago?

BJ: No, I don't think so. I guess I knew that I wanted to develop the arts as much as possible. I didn't think it would be doing so much leadership stuff.

LW: You've also been organising other ways of bringing teachers and educators together. Ben – with your contemporary arts resource and both of you through teach meets – what motivates you to do these types of events?

KS: Similar to Bow Arts, it's about a network – and this is making it wider. You have to keep going. It's great to be in a room of like-minded people – for that kind of audience it's brilliant and inspiring.

BJ: It's that wider idea – a lot of the swapping of ideas is stuff that happens in the consortia – we are basically doing this in a similar way with a London-wide group of teachers. It's really about teachers who are in class everyday sharing things that worked really well. That is so powerful. It's really different from training that you might get sent on and you sit there and an organisation suggests something which isn't bespoke enough

KS: That's it. Its well-meaning, but often misses the practicalities. You really respect it when you are all a bit haggard and tired after a full day's teaching, but you have come here with something to share – you are all in the same boat

LW: There's something very grass-roots about it. What I enjoyed about coming to your session about the contemporary arts resource was that it was a room of passionate people. You hear so much negativity about arts education and that it's declining within schools – it paints a dismal picture.

BJ: I don't think it's necessarily that dismal – actually the thing about teach meets is that they are really positive events. There is such a temptation as a teacher to moan – but they are never like that. Everyone has something positive to say.

KS: Teachers work incredibly hard. You walk around and you hear their effort. There is a real understanding there. We're tired, we're working too hard – but you only have to present for five minutes and there's wine!

LW: Teachers always bring this amazing excitement. They come, eat all the snacks – and want to learn and try new things.

BJ: You wouldn't become a teacher if you didn't want to learn new things.

KS: You've never mastered your trade.

BJ: I always remember with that book Ken Robinson – Creative Schools – he talks about how you can't change what's happening above you – the government is always going to be changing things. You need to then think about yourself and the other people that are in class every day and how you can do things together – doing great things and start sending this up the rung. Instead of it coming down it's the people on the ground trialling stuff and feeding it back up.

KS: There is a big voice pushing for the power of arts – it's not like we're lone rangers.



ADDRESSING NEEDS THROUGH ART

Sarah Nightingale (Assistant Head, Bygrove Primary School) discusses addressing school needs through creative projects, the importance of art within the curriculum and trust and relationships that have built through five years of working in partnership. This interview was conducted jointly by Bow Arts Education Project Managers Aidan Adams and Lucy Wheeler.

LW: What has been your approach to commissioning Bow Arts on your Poplar projects?

SN: Sometimes it has come from a school development priority. This year our priority was about outdoor learning, so that inspired this year's bespoke project. In the past it has been data driven. An example of this was developing a project that supported our reluctant, less confident readers, which focused on a specific group of children. Bow Arts projects were therefore aligned with initiatives happening already and the partnership is another way of supporting pupils in the context of art and creativity.

AA: It's great that you see that as an option. Some schools wouldn't necessarily link those two together – a targeted intervention that can be addressed with an artist coming in and some form of creative activity.

SN: What stands out for me is that there is never a rule of thumb. Sometimes it's a targeted group of children, sometimes its groups from Year 1- 6. This year we've focused on children who might find playtimes and lunchtimes a challenge, or those who may struggle with relationships. We've also taken a whole schools approach. I'm never in a position where I think 'what did we do last year - are we going to do the same?' - each project has been completely different.

AA: It seems like lots of the projects have very different starting points, to address gaps within the school development plan but there is always a physical outcome, something to

contribute to the physical landscape of the school?

SN: Yes, we have commissioned projects that have an impact on the building. We did the backdrop to our stage [see Bygrove case study] which is a permanent fixture and still links to our curriculum today. The corridor project has remained, and the project we're working on this year will also have a legacy, an opportunity for creative and sensory play in the playground. We aim for the project to help children have purpose outdoors to help them engage and support them make friends through play, with a stimulus.

AA: Do you think having a permanent outcome has a bit more of a concrete legacy in terms of having that profile of the subject matter that the children looked at or the creative experience in the school – it's easier to track I guess than something that's more open-ended or process oriented?

SN: Yes, the permanent fixtures do have that impact and the children are inspired by them and use them. I'm really excited about this year's project, because it will be something the children physically use and interact with.

LW: There's something about the stage background and this upcoming project – it's changing the culture of how you use your space outdoors.

SN: Yes, exactly. The impact on not just on the here and now but children in three years' time will hopefully be able to benefit from the outcome.

AA: I think the thing that's really exciting for me is the way Ania [the artist] is going to be working with the children is open and playful so there's that element in the lead up to making this thing that will be used and will determine how children use the playground

SN: Yes, the brief for this is very open and child-led.

AA: There's a lot of trust that's going into the artist, the children and the staff working

here – has that been a different dynamic because usually we take the starting inspiration and maybe there's a bit of a fixed idea about what we're working towards – for me this seems to be a slightly different way of doing things?

SN: I think it's quite exciting that there's a big idea but the brief doesn't have a series of specific success criteria. There is the idea and aim of improving our external spaces, but it could go down a building route; it could go down a messy play route. If we're going to achieve a legacy the children have to be inspired and engaged otherwise it won't have an impact. I'm always very confident with Bow Arts because we've only ever got a really high quality outcome. That may be because we've worked together for all that time and there is a strong relationship there.

LW: And what have you found that artists have brought to Bygrove?

SN: Their specialist skills and knowledge in certain areas. It's all very well saying you've got an artist coming in - but can they engage children and use their level of understanding to allow children to be a part of that? This always happens, and we trust you and you have a good understanding of our school which has meant that projects have worked out really well.

AA: That matchmaking element is always easier to do when we have a really good relationship with the Art Coordinator, who's able to convey what they want and why they are commissioning a project – it makes that process of bringing an artist in much easier for us. Some schools that don't necessarily know what they like but know what they don't like which gives us less clues

LW: Or I guess sometimes they don't know what an artist can bring.

SN: But I think that's where the Project Managers come in because it's based on that trust and relationship. We might say we want to use this space as a trigger for play and we want it to be sensory – so we come up with these big ideas and then once you have that you go away and find someone who can deliver on that and that's always been successful.

LW: I believe there needs to be certain conditions that make that really productive. For example – I felt very motivated when we had our meeting about outdoor learning, play, child-led – for me that’s really exciting ground to be in because there’s lots of artists who really enjoy working alongside children as researchers, thinking about a site and not quite knowing where it’s going – often for artists that might be the state they find to be really productive. It’s productive for us when we know the schools well so we can think with more knowledge and confidence of what will work well, knowing that there’s flexibility from the school as well. You understand what it will be like to have an artist – it might get messy or we might need to work with smaller groups of children – it’s prioritising and being flexible to get those conditions right – it’s all of those things that make it really pleasurable the whole way through to work collaboratively.

SN: It’s knowing what you want from the project. For me it was really important that we chose children who we had concerns about in the playground, so that we can help them socially– give them the skills, teach them how to play, as well as delivering something for the children in a more concrete way - a structure or resource they can play with.

LW: That’s a really lovely process for me to go through with you and the school – you’re noticing something and then being able to address it through bringing an artist in.

CONVIVIALITY AND EXTENDED COLLEAGUES

Bow Arts Education Project Managers Aidan Adams and Lucy Wheeler discuss their roles within the Poplar Partnership with former Education Project Manager Kirsty Lowry (Curator: Schools and Teachers, Whitechapel Gallery).

LW: Thinking back to your time at Bow Arts, working on the Poplar Consortium Programme, what projects particularly come to mind?

KL: The key element I take from it [the Poplar Consortium] was the year-on-year element of a group of schools being closely related to each others' projects, especially through coordinator's meetings. Through those conversations, and through us, as Project Managers, holding that knowledge of projects that we could cross-filter within one given project. That's the value of the consortium. That's what I took away from it.

I enjoyed the process of project creation. For example, thinking about Manorfield, John [John Mayson – former Art Coordinator at Manorfield Primary] and I would meet and get really excited about things we were passionate about, like making and materials – and want to share that passion! For the glass project [see Manorfield case study], we chose one material in particular and saw where that could lead us. It worked. It all came out of a good conversation and a passion for something that creative practitioners respectively could bring – with the Project Manager and the teacher excited about the process. What was just as important was the exhibition and other conversations I had with the other Art Coordinators, with them saying 'Wow – you did this in school?' – and it didn't matter if that didn't directly transfer into a similar project. It was more like setting a bar for something that can be very experimental.

AA: That opportunity to see these types of experimental projects can open up different avenues for Art Coordinators, which don't necessarily start with conversations about an end product.

LW: From the glass project we see an openness to using materials less seen in the primary

classroom – concrete, jesmonite, resin, porcelain. I feel you need to have a tacit understanding of these materials and how they react, the processes you go through to use them.

KL: It makes people immediately ask questions – parents, pupils, teachers – ‘how did you do that?’ – there’s an immediate curiosity.

AA: For lots of these types of projects, pupils go out to an artist’s studio and acknowledge what artists do day-to-day. In other projects I guess the flux between teacher and artist is more obscure.

KL: When I was consolidating my thoughts, what came across was the importance of being true to an artist’s practice. When I thought through the commonalities of projects that really stood out – what I realised was it was about that pairing between artist and school. It’s not just recruiting somebody because they can impart specific knowledge and skill – it’s more about it being imbedded within their practice. Obviously bringing in someone like Shelley James for the glass project is a really good example of this. More specifically, bringing Haidée into Lansbury Lawrence. We were working with jesmonite casting, inspired by the modernist architecture of the building. Haidée’s practice is centred on her interest in modernist architecture – of course this was a fantastic match. It’s rooted in something she is passionate about.

AA: And it feeds their art practice as much as it provides an innovative project for the school.

KL: You get slightly closer then to co-production of original pieces and being able to articulate in those terms. I think it’s an important distinction to be made, which comes from a sophistication of practice.

AA: It’s a depth of engagement/sophistication that then runs through everything – teacher’s engagement – pupils/parents. It raising the level of the projects

KL: exactly

LW: And often these ideas start organically. For example, you didn't set out with the glass project to link science and art

KL: Yes – it wasn't as explicit as that, though we knew that's what we were doing

LW: The ordering is different – same with Lansbury Lawrence which started with the building, but obviously crossed into Design and Technology, and History.

KL: Obviously there is an incredibly high level of ambition of some of the teachers that we are talking about here. There is also positive things to say about the approach that Bow Arts takes. The kind of conversations and starting points you take with schools. In terms of the consortium – they have already been recruited, that job has already been done. It allowed a certain freedom. You can go into it knowing you are going to do a project together; we know what the allocation of days/budget there is. Your parameters are set, so you can be creative within those. And it doesn't always work out – I've discussed some exemplary schools, and it does come down to how free those Art Coordinators feel they can be – how backed up they are by senior management.

AA: There is something to be said about the dynamic of personalities in this group of schools. That relationship with Project Manager and Art Coordinator is a bit different to other relationships. It's a bit more of an even keel – don't you think?

KL: I think that's what I'm getting at. There's a parallel of why everyone is there – you've already got excited about something. You bring in an artist, where excitement is part of the thread of their way of working and research.

AA: I also think the relationships become strong enough to say 'I am not sure that's the right approach' or 'let's try it and see', I think this helps to have more of a fertile proving ground to test things

KL: I think testing is a really good word to pull out. I think it's not that easy within a school environment to say 'let's just experiment' – it's a lot of money, a lot of commitment is needed, there's a lot of trust involved.

AA: I think the unique thing we have with these schools is that we don't necessarily just speak to the art coordinators

LW: Yes – you know the wider staff team, the receptionists, site team

KL: That's a really good point. Also the fact that it's outreach in that sense – you are always going into their front door, so those sort of incidental relationships that build up become really vital. You become part of the school community. Also, the beginnings of a project that might happen down the line, may have started in a chat in the corridor two years before – about a certain condition of the school, or an issue that keeps cropping up. It's not so formal as asking 'Let's have a look at your development priorities' – you do have an awareness and understanding of this – I hesitate to use the word informal – because it is a professional relationship, but I guess there are some informalities that have built up the consortium. This translates back into the Coordinator's meetings – one that sticks out for me is sitting around the bonfire at Manorfield with our marshmallows. These moments are important and lend a sense of conviviality to how you are communicating with each other, which is so rich.

AA: It's further embedded in the structure now – we've really taken that and run with it – through the away days to Margate and South End. Those moments – getting teachers out of school – talking outside of our institutions

KL: It's human, isn't it?

LW: And it offers the opportunity to learn more about the individual ambitions and practice that motivate those teachers, as well as getting to know each other – they are extended colleagues

KL: Absolutely. And I would still say the same thing here [at Whitechapel Gallery]. You use the word ‘colleague’ to refer to the people that you share an office with, but I always consider the artists and teachers as my colleagues. They are the ones that I am generating creative projects with. That’s my team.

LW: Something that stands out for me is an openness to sharing practice and ideas – what are your thoughts on this?

KL: Yes – a generosity of ideas. I think in the context of education this should be what everyone is seeking for, right? And I think that generosity gets picked up by the children – it’s a mood.

LW: There is a raising of the bar as we said which pushes creativity. You see this most at the Celebration Event where the teachers are genuinely curious to find out and see other approaches.

KL: And there is, in the wider sense with these Tower Hamlets schools, a sharing – between Headteachers and other staff leaders – Bow Arts didn’t invent that, but it perhaps had a knock-on effect with regard to a culture of sharing. I suppose there is something that could be taken from that in terms of schools taking advantage of a culture of generosity – whatever you think about academies and all this – hopefully that can be something that continues to grow as a positive thing and a means of positive networks. Then arts organisations can come in to facilitate some of those shared goals and ambitions. The fundamental thing for me is bringing another voice in.

Like looking at the problem sideways – which I think an artist or any creative practitioner does. There’s a tendency in schools to face a problem in terms of labour, budgets, etc. But what if you turn that on its head and come in the back door – what if you take the door off its hinges and skip through it – you know, if one school allows that access route, if you like. The value of creative practice is that it has a tangible outcome – it’s showing progress visually rather than through a spreadsheet – you can see it. Which is human and it communicates. It’s still hard to clearly show the impact and value. We’ve been talking about

some pretty exemplary projects, practitioners and schools – I’ve certainly been involved in projects where you are much further down the line away from that place, because the conditions of the schools don’t allow for it. There’s resistance, and perhaps fear, or lack of understanding or lack of budget flexibility.

AA: You’ve got to meet where a school’s at. You’ve got to be speaking in the same language

KL: And that’s where the Project Management role is vital and comes into its own. You have to, very quickly, assess the situation and conditions. What is this school willing to do here?

LW: Our role can be tricky – you’re building a relationship whilst trying to support a school to fully utilise and understand the importance of creative practice and that sometimes makes people feel uncomfortable. We, as practitioners, are comfortable in the ‘not knowing’ where a project might lead, but have trust in the artists we bring in – which is comfortable for us. Everyone has a different skill-set – you need to understand this and be responsive to it.

KL: And then you can work out your role in the project, how much you need to step in or stand back – you end up having a bit of an informal mentoring role. It’s a knowledge of all of those nuances and how to react to them which is important to acknowledge.

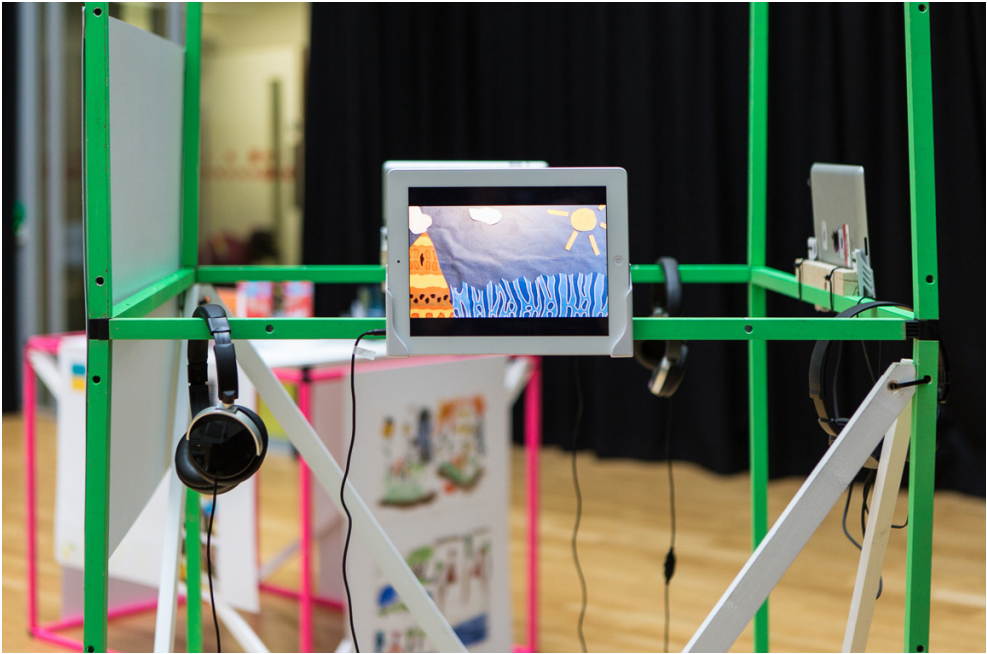
CELEBRATION EVENT

The outcomes and achievements of each consortia year are recognised in a Celebration Event. The event brings the schools' Art Coordinators, teachers, pupils and the wider school community together at this annual event, held at Spotlight Youth Club.

Part ideas exchange, creative workshops and exhibition, it's provided opportunities for teachers to reflect and learn from each other and for pupils to take part in collaborative workshops and share skills learnt in their individual projects. The following photographs give a snapshot of the Celebration Event over the past five years.

















Langdon
Park
School



ALDGATE
& ALLHALLOWS



THANK YOU

This publication was written by the Bow Arts Education team: Aidan Adams, Helen Bradbury, Laura Lloyd, and Lucy Wheeler, with contributions from: Laura Coates, Caroline de Souza, Atlanta Duffy, Ben Jones, Kirsty Lowry, Sarah Nightingale, John Mayson, Siodhna O'Dowd, Kerri Sellens and Rob Smith.

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Fanoula Smith – St Saviour's CE Primary School

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About Bow Arts

Bow Arts is an arts education charity that provides affordable creative workspaces for over 500 emerging artists, designers and makers. Alongside this, Bow Arts manages one of the country's most exciting education programmes, which takes professional artists into schools across 16 boroughs in London to improve the lives and learning of children and young people. Bow Arts runs the Nunnery Gallery, a free public gallery that supports a diverse range of high quality exhibitions and events as well as the delivery of a public arts programme. Established in 1995, Bow Arts holds an important place in east London which is fast becoming known as London's Artist Quarter.

www.bowarts.org

**THIS PUBLICATION OUTLINES THE SHARED
ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE BOW ARTS POPLAR
CONSORTIUM PROGRAMME, CELEBRATING
FIVE YEARS OF COLLABORATION.**

**THROUGH CASE STUDIES, SHORT ESSAYS AND
INTERVIEWS, THE PUBLICATION AIMS TO CONTEMPLATE
WHAT ARTS EDUCATION CAN BE, TO VALIDATE WHAT
ARTISTS CAN BRING TO SCHOOLS AND DEMONSTRATE
THE VALUE OF LONG-TERM COLLABORATION.**

