

THE SACRED SPACES PROJECT

Developing a Creative and Cultural Curriculum in Faith Based Settings

An article prepared for the summer edition of 'Race Equality Teaching'



Maurice Irfan Coles, Project Director
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The Sacred Spaces Project

Developing a Creative and Cultural Curriculum in Faith Based Settings

“For me it was being creative...it was a completely new experience.” **Young project participant**

“One thing I will do differently as a result of being involved in this project is that, I would respect different religions more because I know more about them.” **Young project participant**

“Faith related artistic learning has a great future.” **Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, Crownhills Madrasah**

“Postcode wars are a feature of the pupils’ lives but to see the pupils interacting with new people in the celebratory event was a sacred space.” **Reverend Ann Luther, Peckham Road Baptist Church**

It is unusual, but not unprecedented¹, that a project based in the Supplementary Sector of Education can steal an innovative pedagogic march on their more illustrious and better funded colleagues in mainstream schools. The Sacred Spaces Project achieved just this. Funded by Creativity, Culture and Education, CCE², supported in kind by the FSTC³, and independently evaluated by the Office of Public Management⁴, the project ran over a nine month period in 2011. This article describes that highly ambitious project. It offers an overarching narrative, outlines its objectives, unpacks the underpinning processes and highlights the project’s outcomes. Description however does not necessarily lead to change or encourage others. The learning points are therefore itemized. The project’s pitfalls honestly appraised and a number of models suggested that encourage and explain how the project can be taken forward by individual institutions, or by groups. All the detailed background papers as well as hyperlinks to organisations and funders that share similar aims are available on CE4CE’S website (www.CE4CE.org). A key project aim was to stimulate a national and ongoing dialogue about the role of the arts in supplementary schools and this article contributes to that debate. The project had four further aims:

1. To support creative teaching and learning in supplementary schools
2. To provide young people with creative and cultural ways to learn about their own and other faiths and heritages
3. To inspire young people in the arts
4. To encourage interfaith dialogue amongst educators and young people.

¹ See the ICE project (www.theiceproject.com) where young people argued that the teaching of citizenship in madrasahs was better than in schools

² www.creativitycultureeducation.org

³ www.fstc.org.uk

⁴ www.opm.co.uk

The overall aim was to design trial and evaluate a creative and cultural learning module in four faith settings bringing together Jews, Muslims, Christians and Hindus with selected artists in a joint collaborative enterprise.

What did we do and who was involved?

The development of a creativity module in faith based settings was a joint enterprise between CCE and CE4CE who felt that the Sacred Space theme would help focus each setting, provide an interfaith and spiritual dimension and assist in the evaluative processes. The development of the creativity module was not dependent on the faith element however. Indeed a secular theme could equally have been chosen.

Fiona Scoble of FSTC/CE4CE was charged with the day to day project management and with running the complex organisation in four different locations that took place with different personnel at different times. A project steering group followed by round table discussions offered critical advice and support throughout, as did the OPM team. A final round table event brought together a diverse range of people who offered advice as to sustainability.⁵

The original specification was clarified and a precise evaluation brief added. The faith settings themselves were either known personally by, or recommended to the project director. Four settings, two in Leicester and two in London, came on board and after competitive interviews, four artists were appointed.

The artist's specialism's (photography, glass making, architecture and storytelling) were considered in their appointment in order to ensure that a range of disciplines was covered. Faith background was not a criterion. By chance, three artists were adherents of three of the major faiths and after discussion with the settings it was decided to place them in faith settings with which they were not familiar. It was left to the appointed artist to negotiate the nature and timing of project delivery with their respective setting. Some consistency was guaranteed however by insistence on common training programmes, and at least two related off site visits. The following table details the variety of artists, settings, participants and different delivery models employed.

⁵ See CE4CE Sacred Spaces Round Table meeting

| Supplementary Setting | Artist | Participants | Delivery |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spinney Hill Gujarati Parents Association, Leicester Lead Educator : Daxaben Parmar | Rabiyah Latif, Photographer www.rklphotography.co.uk | 25 young people 11 – 15 years old | Delivered over the course of 5 consecutive mornings in July 2011. Included on-site workshops and visits to a church, synagogue, mandir and the Jewry Wall Museum. |
| Crown Hills Madrasah, Leicester Lead Educator : Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra | Sue Purser Hope, Glass artist www.purserhope.co.uk | 15 young people 12 – 14 years old | Delivered as two hour workshops/visits over the course of 8 days in September and October 2011. Included on-site workshops and visits to a Cathedral and Museum. |
| Peckham Park Road Baptist Church, London Lead Educator : Reverend Ann Luther | Dvora Liberman, Story Teller dvoraliberman@googlemail.com | 15 young people 7-12 years old | Delivered over the course of 4 Sunday mornings in October 2011. Included on site-workshops and visits to a local mosque, an amateur theatre and the Lion King. |
| Alyth North Western Reform Synagogue, London Lead Educator : Nikki Levitan | Alison Davies, Architect www.groundworksarchitects.co.uk | 8 young people 9-12 years old | Delivered over the course of 3 consecutive full days in August 2011. Included on-site workshops and visits to Serpentine pavilion, mosque and the Museum of Diversity. |

Faith setting educators and the young people themselves were the project's target audiences and precise briefs were written for both. These formed the basis for the letters to parents. For the educators, their major objectives were the development of enhanced creative, teaching and learning

skills which was to be achieved by working alongside artists; and through the sacred spaces vehicle, interaction with members of other faith groups. For the young people involved they were to take part in a major project designed to enhance their artistic and creative skills and their knowledge and understanding of aspects of their own cultural and faith heritage, as well as the cultural and faith heritage of others.

The programme consisted of four different but related elements:

- Training, initially for the artists involved and then for educators
- Artist-led learning modules
- A final Celebratory event
- The offer of the Bronze Arts Award for interested students

Not only did the Arts Award act as a powerful incentive for several of the settings but it provided an ideal framework for the artistic direction of those involved. The Arts Award (www.artsaward.org.uk) is a nationally recognised qualification which is designed for 11-25 year olds, though two new levels for age 7 upwards will be available from April 2012.

The Bronze Award consists of 4 parts:

- Taking part in the arts
- Being the audience
- Arts heroes and heroines
- Arts apprenticeship

It is designed to be delivered in approximately 40 guided hours where the artist and tutors involved, help structure the experience. In addition, students are expected to undertake roughly 20 hours of independent learning. Student work is moderated internally and then verified by an external assessor. One educator per setting attended a full day's training session which qualified them to be Arts Award Advisers.

All artists and educators attended a CE4CE training session which focused on educating participants about the benefits and tools of creative and cultural learning. In addition, when time permitted discussions took place about the nature of sacred spaces which focussed on the following questions:

- What are sacred spaces?
- Where do they exist?
- When are they used?
- Why are they so important?

It was generally agreed that a sacred space could be found 'simply anywhere,' were not necessarily faith dependent and existed in architecture, in nature, in art sculpture and stained glass, in music sacred and secular, in literature and storytelling, in symbols and imagery and ritual and prayer.⁶

Educator training was delivered in 3-4 hours at a venue of their choice, sometimes with the artist in attendance. As well as explaining the nature of the project and the support offered, the training focused upon a discussion of teaching and learning styles and participants were asked to reflect

⁶ See Ibid 5. The Nature of the Sacred

upon their own education and preferred teaching methods. Participants described the words and abilities they associated with creative learning and what the benefits of such learning might be for young people. Their lists were then compared with the “*five creative learning habits and sub habits of mind*” provided by CCE and their related Creativity Wheel.⁷ There proved to be a remarkable correlation between these lists and the creative learning habits. These habits, summarised below, formed the creative bedrock of the whole project and were used extensively in delivery in all settings.

Creative Learning Habits and sub-Habits of Mind

| <i>Habit of Mind</i> | <i>Sub-Habits of Mind</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Inquisitive | Wondering and Questioning Exploring and Investigating Challenging assumptions |
| 2. Persistent | Tolerating uncertainty Sticking with difficulty Daring to be different |
| 3. Imaginative | Playing with possibilities Making connections Using intuition |
| 4. Disciplined | Crafting and Improving Developing techniques Reflecting critically |
| 5. Collaborative | Cooperating appropriately Giving and receiving feedback Sharing the ‘product’ |

Primed with the knowledge, skills and understanding imparted during the training, the settings moved to the main thrust of the project, the Artist-led learning modules. Each setting was assigned an artist who delivered a combination of on-site workshops focusing on the theme of ‘sacred spaces’ and visits to other faith settings or museums. The precise timing and nature of the input was a matter for negotiation between the artist and the educators. There was, however, a clear expectation that the educators were to be active and reflective participants who at project end would be able to both articulate and act upon their new learning. The learning modules culminated in final creative outputs that were displayed and shared at the celebratory event.

The Celebratory event took place at the Royal Society in London, in October 2011, where participants explored each other’s creative outputs and had the opportunity to present their work to

⁷ See Ibid 2.

an audience consisting of parents, educators and creative learning stakeholders and practitioners. In addition, the young people were given several tasks related to the nature and creation of sacred spaces which they completed in mixed groups.

Was the project successful?

As the OPM report demonstrates in nuanced detail, replete with teacher and pupil quotes, the overwhelming answer was 'yes'. For young people there was strong or good evidence that the project had led to an:

- Increased enjoyment of supplementary school provision
- Increased confidence and raised aspirations around craft and arts based skills
- Increased demonstration of creative learning habits

And there was some evidence that they had developed an:

- Increased ability to express ideas around faith and heritage
- Increased appreciation of commonalities between faith groups

In particular, *'observation during site visits confirmed that **arts based learning did in fact encourage the young people to express their ideas of faith and heritage...the young people used their creative outputs to eloquently make connections between the different rituals relating to their faith and the notion of sacredness. Many young people also felt that the positive learning environment created by the artists also encouraged young people to explore and express their thoughts about faith and identity.***⁸

For educators there was strong evidence that they had developed a better understanding of the benefits of creative and cultural approaches to learning and that working alongside the artists had made them much more willing to try such approaches themselves. They were particularly positive about the creative learning habits and Creative Wheel and generally were enthusiastic about the benefits of interfaith work.

In summary, OPM identified the following as key success factors:

- The positive **learning environment** created by the artists
- The use of **creative media**
- The **site visits**
- **Collaborative working** between the different delivery partners
- The buy-in and **involvement of parents**
- The **use of learning frameworks** like creative learning habits, and the HEART model employed by one artist⁹

⁸ See Ibid 4.

⁹ For more details of the HEART model see www.CE4CE.org

There were things that could have been done better. It would have helped if the Arts Award had been properly integrated from the start. More project planning time, better communication and more time for the young people from different settings to interact would have enhanced the project.

The greatest hurdle for the project was the voluntary nature of supplementary schools, and that most of the volunteer educators were also in full time employment. Communication and meeting in person was a difficulty. The last word, however, rests with the young people who, when asked by OPM about the one thing that they will do differently as a result of the project, replied:

- *'Appreciate art more'*
- *'Make sure that I continue doing drama'*
- *'Think twice about other religions and faiths'*
- *'...respect different religions more because I know more about them'*
- *'Take more pictures of ordinary things, not just if I was outside, because it gives a new perspective on ordinary things'*

What happens next?

The enormous benefits to the young people and the educators involved are clear and this reinforces the wealth of evidence we have about the fundamental importance of creativity in education.¹⁰ It also adds to the growing canon of Sacred Spaces literature.¹¹

The final Round Table emphasised that the lessons learnt must help other settings, both supplementary and mainstream, attempt similar projects themselves.¹² The strength of the project lies in its adaptability. It can be repeated entirely or any of its component parts used separately. Supplementary schools could use the Creativity modules and the training and apply it to any area of their work. Mainstream schools might opt for the Arts Award or Sacred Spaces or both as the main foci. Delivery can be weekly, or in blocks or in summer school format. It can operate as a standalone or integrated. It can be operated anywhere with local artists.¹³

¹⁰ Council www.lotc.org.uk/what-is-lotc/where-lotc/sacred-spaces/

Inspiring learners through sacred spaces

Engaging Places www.engagingplaces.org.uk/teaching+resources/art68331

RE fuel - Sacred Space www.refuel.org.uk/sacred-space

¹¹ The CCE website is the main vehicle:

All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education www.sirkenrobinson.com/skr/pdf/allourfutures.pdf

The Arts, Creativity and Cultural Education: An International Perspective www.inca.org.uk/pdf/finalreport.pdf

¹² See *ibid.*

¹³ This organisation has a nationwide artist index <http://www.lonsas.org.uk/artsdirectory.aspx>

Below are four possible models:

Model one: Supplementary school stand alone

Any one of the countries estimated 5000 supplementary schools could follow a reduced programme using the materials found on line at CE4CE which include the training package, background materials and a website devoted to all artists available for such work

Model two: Supplementary school in conjunction with Mainstream

Increasingly, supplementary schools are working with their mainstream partners. Delivery could be shared between two sites with, for example, mainstream organising and funding the Arts Award and supplementary delivering some of the teaching with the appointed artist

Model three: a consortium of Supplementary schools

Groups of supplementary schools could come together to plan an areas wide project perhaps facilitated by local authorities or trusts, such as those that exist in Bradford, Bristol or Leicester. In this they could be supported by ContinYou¹⁴ or their local interfaith network.

Model four: mainstream school alone

An individual school could follow the Arts Award, employing the training and an artist to undertake a small project. The project lends itself to the Primary Creative Curriculum; and in secondary schools, the Art, Design and Technology and RE departments could operate discretely or together.

Conclusion

All those involved with Sacred Spaces, managers, evaluators, artists, educators and young people have found it an uplifting and inspiring experience demonstrating that if there is a will, some funding and organisation the supplementary sector can lead the way in creating an inspirationally creative environment for those they serve. Indeed, *'Faith related artistic learning has a great future.'*

¹⁴ ContinYou operates The National Resource Centre which is a support network for supplementary schools
www.continyou.org.uk