

One and Other: exploring individual and collective identities in a changing world

A Space for creative learning and support and **iniva** (the Institute of International Visual Arts) share a commitment to using the arts to explore themes linked to identity, memory, belonging and sense of self. Our joint work and our individual projects have looked at ways in which our identity is constructed and re-formed over time. We are keen to investigate how the past and the present influence this process. We're especially drawn to identifying the kinds of insights, tensions and creative resolutions that arise when our understanding of ourselves or others moves away from meanings or ideas that are central to our own cultural histories or to our family narratives.

Our exploration extends to thinking about what makes communities work. A cohesive community relies on the basic acceptance that different generations, lifestyles, attitudes and world views can co-exist without any one being valued over another. Cohesive communities depend on all of us being able to relate meaningfully and authentically with each other. Building relationships between adults and children, between artists, art therapists, teachers and parents/carers and between schools and organisations is central to the work of A Space and of iniva.

ONE AND OTHER Case Study

A Space and **iniva** co-designed four interlinking projects in the London Borough of Hackney under the Enquiry School programme. **The Enquiry Schools programme** strand is a one-year creative learning opportunity for schools to work with a creative partner and explore what creativity is, and how it can drive improvement in an area identified within the School Development Plan. It enables schools to explore:

- what it really means for young people to be creative
- what it is that teachers and other creative professionals actually do to encourage and develop that creativity, either working individually or together
- how the setting and focus of learning affects creativity both in class and at school level
- how creativity can drive improvement in an area important to the school, as identified within the School Improvement Plan

Year 6 pupils from four primary schools - Shacklewell, Sebright, Brook Community School and St Scholasticas - participated in Hackney's '**One and Other**'. Supporting community cohesion was a key aim. Curriculum areas encompassed art and design, literacy, geography and history. Emotional resilience was improved as pupils had to learn to accept when things went wrong or the outcome fell short of their expectations. Group skills were fostered as all the projects included collective tasks. An A Space art therapist worked alongside each artist. Her role was to provide practical support and to work sensitively with pupils when difficult personal memories or feelings were triggered by the subject matter covered.

Supporting the primary/ secondary transfer also featured. All projects focused on Year 6 and the participating pupils mixed together at the final exhibition where the artists spoke to them about their own practice as well as their experiences working in Hackney schools.

Case Study - Community Cohesion A Space and Iniva Creative Partnerships Enquiry School Project

2010

The Olympics provided the context for all of our enquiries. Placing cultural energy alongside the world's largest sporting and media event, our four projects investigated how young people from diverse cultural backgrounds are forming their own identity by responding to their contemporary culture and transforming their cultural histories in the process. **One and Other** used culturally diverse artists chosen by iniva for their own explorations into group and individual identity, private and public histories and mining the many strata of collective memory. Each school project focused on an enquiry question:

- **Shacklewell:** How does food give us a sense of belonging?
- **Sebright:** How does architecture relate to our sense of place?
- **Brook:** How does language link the past with the present as well as shape the future?
- **St Scolasticas:** How can sound, lyrics and music contribute to our ability to communicate across cultures?

Shacklewell School's Year 6 pupils worked with artist **Agnes Poitevin Navarre**. They investigated how different cultures used to be easily identified by the food they ate and the way they prepared it. Rituals around choosing, preparing and eating food were discussed from the perspective of what this reveals about our culture or family background. Pupils also learned how food can be read as symbols of historical power struggles. For example, potatoes, coffee and bananas all have a role to play in history. Food also features in private histories. Pupils researched this area by talking to extended family about current and lost ingredients, recipes and serving ware that linked them with their past or marked a departure from cultural attitudes or approaches to food.

Pupils then made their own plates out of card and created different kinds of foods – real and imaginary - to put on them. The plates were decorated with words describing how food might taste such as 'hot as a sizzling pavement in summer', or 'cold as ice-frosted trees in winter'. The theme was then expanded and pupils imagined food as a metaphor for nurturing or feeding the mind. Pupils came up with 'recipes' to create the kind of people they would admire and respect. They asked each other *'What ingredients does it take to make a valued friend? A son or daughter that the family can be proud of? A brother or sister who is appreciated?'* The pupils finished off the project with a visit to a ceramic studio in Hackney where they made plates featuring their own designs capturing their past or present relationship with food.

At Sebright School, artist **Dia Batal** designed workshops for Year 6 pupils focusing on domestic architecture. They were encouraged to investigate different architectural characteristics of their families' countries of origin, through collecting stories from family members, and constructing a drawing based on those descriptions. Questions they researched included *'Where do my ancestors come from? What kinds of homes have they lived in? What can my family members or relatives tell me about past homes?'*

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2010

The pupils then made maps that reflected the interior of their own home. They also brought in a cultural object or artefact or drew a picture of one. Objects were as simple as a serving dish or a glass or a mug that had been passed down the generations from grandparents or even great grandparents. Pupils looked into the stories their family told in relation to the object they chose. Then they wrote a story describing the history of their object.

Pupils used this research to construct collective imaginary objects based on those they'd brought from home or drawn from imagination that had certain cultural significance for them. They used objects from the Hackney Scrap Project which they wrapped in layers of newspaper from different countries to obscure the shapes. These wrapped objects were then joined together to form group sculptures that represent imaginary artefacts from either the past or the future. A temporary museum was created in their classroom to display what they made.

Artist Larry Achiampong worked at both **Brook Community School** and **St Scholasticas**. Year 6 pupils at Brook began by researching a hero from their own culture. They asked their parents/carers to help. Back in the classroom they took turns recording their stories on audio. Some told theirs in their own language. They also wrote down the story and made collages to illustrate them. Two groups then focused on sound production, choosing which stories or fragments to keep and which to leave out. The other two groups worked on image production using Moviemaker and Photoshop to re-create excerpts from the stories using the collages and drawings made by the pupils as raw material. The final pieces were brought together to form a sound and audio installation.

At **St Scholasticas**, pupils investigated particular types of sounds and visual elements associated with their country of origin, their place of birth and the home they currently live in. This was recorded using sound, written words from a parent/ carer/ member of their cultural community, testimonials, speeches from political leaders, and photos linked to the culture/s in question. This materials was shaped in a hybrid-story-song-video-'mash-up' celebrating the various cultures that coexist in Hackney.

The idea that communities can come together, generating fluid, ever-changing identities that look forward rather than backwards in time, formed an underlying subtext for all four projects. The overarching aim was to reflect the Olympic concept by bringing together the work created in four school communities in a multi-media event at iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts) in the Education Gallery. The exhibition, which took place in April 2010, included film footage, photographs and a sound installation that presented young people as authors of their own narrative, communicating their understanding and experience of diversity. The ceramic plates made by Shacklewell pupils and the sculptures created at Sebright were also shown. The four projects were developed as a multi-media learning resource which will be available from May 2010 to be downloaded from the iniva website.

A New Direction

Case Study - Community Cohesion A Space and Iniva Creative Partnerships Enquiry School Project

2010

A New Direction is an independent charity, working with London's schools and young people to develop creative approaches to learning. Through partnership projects, aspirations are raised and skills are built, connecting young people to their city and the opportunities around them. A New Direction has been funded to deliver the London **Creative Partnerships** programme, and develop programmes in collaboration with a range of cross-sector partnerships.

A Space

A Space for creative learning and support is a research and development project that was initiated in 1997 by Alex Sainsbury (Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts) in partnership with The Social Science Research Unit (Institute of Education) and Hackney Education (now The Learning Trust). The key aim of A Space is to pilot projects and services that creatively meet the psychological, emotional, educational and social needs of children and young people. To achieve this, A Space works in partnership with a range of schools, agencies, universities and organisations. The work of A Space has contributed directly to government policy and national strategies, most notably within the framework of Extended School Services and Every Child Matters. www.aspaceinhackney.org Contact: Lyn French, A Space Director

Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts)

Iniva creates exhibitions, publications, multimedia, education and research projects designed to bring the work of artists from culturally-diverse backgrounds to the attention of the widest possible public. In 2007 Rivington Place, Iniva and Autograph ABP's new contemporary visual arts space, opened in the heart of East London. Supported by the Arts Council England Lottery Capital 2 Programme, it is the UK's first permanent home for culturally diverse visual arts and photography. Barclays Bank plc is the Rivington Place founding corporate partner, contributing £1 million towards the development. This innovative partnership reflects Barclays' history of supporting positive social change and making a real and lasting difference to the diverse communities in which it operates.

www.iniva.org Contact: Teresa Ledda, Education Curator