

FAITH, INTERFAITH COHESION AND CREATIVE ARTS – JENNIE JORDAN AND FRANCES NEWBURY

The variety of faiths throughout the world are key components of our cultural heritage and play a central role in the development of drama, music, visual arts, literature and dance, as both a source of inspiration for artists through its compelling narratives, and as a patron of the arts. The unique, non-rational nature of the creative arts makes them the perfect vehicle for exploring the non-rational, tacit parts of human nature and, as a result, the arts are often used by faith groups to explore the emotional truths and connections between individuals, to share understanding and to teach the next generation.

This paper explores the nature of creativity, how creative expression is used to communicate cultural traditions and considers the unique possibilities this offers for promoting understanding between faith groups. The case studies examine how creativity has been used in school or youth group settings to overcome tensions and promote interfaith cohesion.

Creativity

At the heart of all of the creative arts is the notion of creativity itself, so it is useful to consider what creativity is, how it can be learned and how this can be applied to interfaith activities in the creative arts.

Creativity is, according to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the

ability to produce something new through imaginative skill, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form.¹

Creative methodologies can be categorized into five complementary approaches: evolution, synthesis, revolution, reapplication, changing direction.²

Evolutionary creativity is a step by step approach, where an idea is developed from an existing position. As in Sir Issac Newton's statement 'if I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants', evolutionary creativity needs careful study of existing processes, theories or technologies and then adapts them. The development of the realistic novel in English can, for example, be seen as an evolutionary development from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which featured a strong narrative, but little emotional depth to its main character to Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747–8), which offers insights into its characters' emotions and psychology, through to Jane Austen's writing, which offers this insight and also, through the use of irony, allows the reader to understand that the author may not agree with the characters' own self-assessment.

Synthesis is combining two, apparently unrelated, ideas to develop a new one. For example, the development of the pop video combines music and film to create a new art form.

Revolutionary ideas are those which don't have a basis in any previous approaches. The early 20th Century art movement Dadaism, for example, broke

¹ 'Creativity.' *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. 16 Mar. 2006: <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9361851>>

² Harris, Robert A. *Creative Problem Solving: A Step-by-Step Approach* (Los Angeles: Pyrczak, 2002).

away from the established Romantic tradition in Western Europe in a deliberate rejection of the morality of Western Europe that had led to the First World War.

Reapplication is using something in a new way. Musicians in the West Indies finding a new application for metal oil containers invented steel drums, and a whole new musical form.

Changing Direction involves considering the problem or issue from a different perspective. French painter Georges Seurat was heavily influenced by his Impressionist predecessors, but felt that the irregularity of the brush strokes didn't give the effect he wanted in his work. Seurat invented pointillism after studying the emerging science of light. He realised that he could achieve the effect he wanted by applying small spots of unmixed paint to the white canvas and that, when these points were dense enough, the effect from a distance would be that the paint was mixed.

The **Connecting Communities Case Study** below took a problem community and used many different approaches to solve the problem of interracial tension in the community among young people, particularly the revolutionary and synthesis approaches, by bringing different unrelated agencies together to work on the problem and put forward a novel visionary approach.

Connecting Communities – Charnwood Arts

Group Targeted

All age groups, primary, secondary, youth and adult.

Artform

Various

Partnerships

At present the Connecting Communities partnership includes the Youth Service, Youth Offending Service, the PCT, Sport England, Charnwood Borough Council, the Racial Equality Council and the Police — it is co-ordinated by Charnwood Arts. It is a fairly fluid partnership and at other times has included the CVS and representation from Government Office for the East Midlands.

Original Funding

Home Office/Government Office East Midlands

Background

Loughborough and the borough of Charnwood has become a melting pot of different cultures and faiths. Since the 1960s there have been significant immigrant populations from all over the world and refugees and economic migrants have been moved into the area from London, and other parts of the country. This has, at times, resulted in complex problems, tensions and sometimes conflict in an otherwise peaceful borough. In Autumn 2001 a project entitled 'Connecting Communities', led by Charnwood Arts was one of 6 projects in the East Midlands and 30 nationally which qualified for a government initiative called 'Resolving Differences'.

Project Description

Following an initial 6 month project, Connecting Communities has become a long term all-encompassing programme to look at ways of encouraging cultural cohesion in Charnwood and seek solutions to some of the conflicts. Basically the project has followed a three phase time table.

Phase 1

This was the initial 6 month programme that took place over the spring and summer of 2002. Its aims were to set up systems, research and map the community, identify key issues and start engaging different communities and building relationships with people. 20 facilitators, some from an arts background, some from race relations and some from a youth service background were employed to work in each of 9 selected communities. From the workshops they held they identified the key priorities and possible projects and activities (some arts based other not) to address them. One project that developed at this time was called 'The Next Level Youth Computer Game Café'. This was set up initially to engage with young Bangladeshi's from one side of Loughborough with youths living on a predominantly white housing estate. One of the first activities of the Café was to set up a Gaming Tournament and involved the young people designing computer games characters and included art work, music and photography. A circus project also toured the town's estates ending with a performance by young people at the Loughborough Mela.

Phase 2

This was a much longer term programme and built on the findings and initial successful projects in Phase 1. It involved numerous different projects across the area. It got underway against a backdrop of increasing tension among young people in Loughborough itself. A key target area for Phase 2 was to work with more schools. Projects included 'Where I live where I come from' — a cross cultural museum project where artists worked with school and youth groups looking at cultural identity. It involved 600 8-18 year olds and culminated in a large scale exhibition of the children's work in the local museum. Another project at this time was 'First Floor Faces project', which aimed to break down the feeling that the town centre was a 'no go' area at certain times and for certain sections of the population by exhibiting life size figures in town centre windows that the children had created, based on their own identity.

A project explicitly aimed at interfaith cohesion was The Heart of Loughborough Festival. Interfaith work in Charnwood originally came out of strong links with the Sea of Faith Movement. The Festival initiative was led by a local priest who was working to bring faiths together. The festival, based in a Church of England church, featured dance, music and drama performances and exhibitions on the importance of and forms of marriage in different cultures and attracted people of different faiths into the venue. There was also a performance evening with Black Umfolosi — singers and dancers from South Africa.

Phase 3

The programme has continued to look at new creative cross cultural projects and support ongoing ones (many of which have now taken on a life of their own) but has also been involved in dissemination, consolidation of partnerships and publication. A website was developed and is an important part of the programmes legacy.

Benefits and effects on Social Cohesion

This has been a long term project that initially addressed the wider issue of culture rather than just faith, which has nevertheless been an integral part of it. There is still a way to go but many of the projects that were set up are still running successfully and have indeed brought people from different cultures and religions together where there was either no contact or occasionally confrontation before. The Next Level Café for example, has continued and is now seen as a key tool for the Youth Offending Service, cross cultural after schools clubs, sports

projects and arts and cultural events continue to support the work. Charnwood does enjoy a high level of social cohesion despite having such a mixed population. Key problem areas have been identified and strategies are underway to tackle issues in the borough.

One of the key developments from local cross cultural workshops was the development of the concepts of 'binders' 'barriers' and 'breakers' – each issue or facet of community life was analysed for how it could both contribute to and act as a barrier to or breaker of community cohesion. This ranged from sport, to ethnic identity, racism and work relations down to food, the keeping of pets and hobbies.

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Culture and Memes

It is interesting to note that all of these approaches to creativity develop from established traditions, cultures and ways of thinking or in opposition to them, even the revolutionary approach in the example given is a rejection of existing customs. Edward de Bono argues that *"The brain is not designed to think creatively but to set up routine patterns of perception and behaviour and to make sure we do not deviate from these."*³ These routines and are codified within cultures using stories, myths, rhythms and patterns which are learned during childhood. Mihaly Csikszentmihaly of the Drucker School of Management maintains that creativity is as much as cultural and social process as it is a psychological one, as creativity can be defined as a variation to the rules and practices that are accepted within a cultural group.⁴ Richard Dawkins argued in *The Selfish Gene* that cultures transmit themselves through the generations using units of imitation he called memes, in much the same way as biological information is transmitted using genes.⁵ The lyrics to a nursery rhyme, or the steps to a dance are laid out in instructions (memes) that we learn as written, but from time to time creativity is used to develop new rhymes and dance steps, it is then up to the culture to decided whether these new memes become an accepted norm, or are quickly forgotten. Within Western European Christianity, using stained glass within Church architecture became the norm, whilst Islamic cultures have used tiling and pattern in mosques.

With both cultural memes and human brains pushing towards routine patterns of thought and behaviour, there is a tendency for creative thought, and other cultures to be marginalised and to become a source of suspicion, as they appear to be questioning the status quo and, therefore, the fundamental beliefs of the majority.

As the Land of Dreams case study illustrates, the creative arts can be used explicitly to confront these routine patterns of thought and stereotypes by appealing to the shared non-rational aspects of our common humanity.

³ Edward de Bono Serious Creativity, The Journal for Quality and Participation, Vol. 11-3.

⁴ Csikszentmihaly, Mihaly (1999), 'A Systems Perspective on Creativity', in Henry, Jane (Ed) *Creative Management*, Sage Publications: London, pp13-26

⁵ Dawkins, R (1976), *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Land Of Dreams

Group Targeted

The Dreamers Youth Group is a group for young 14 -20 year old asylum seekers and refugees from Kosovo, Albania, Afghanistan and Iraq and is based in Loughborough. It is a Leicestershire County Council Youth Work Project.

Artform

Cartoon art

Partnerships

New Arrivals Research Team, Loughborough Youth Affairs, Charnwood Arts

Funding

Charnwood Community Cohesion Pathfinder (CCCP), Youth Community Champions (Community Foundation), Government Office East Midlands

Background

The Land of Dreams project came out of research that was being undertaken by Dr Maggie O'Neill from Staffordshire University and the New Arrivals Research Team, part of whose aim was to *'undertake interviews with new arrivals...and explore how their life experiences intersect with race, ethnicity, gender age, language and class through creative consultation.'*⁶ A partnership between the research team and Charnwood Arts was formed to develop the creative dimension to the research and Charnwood Arts appointed artist Paul Gent.

Project Description

Through a series of informal individual and group discussion and questionnaires artist Paul Gent worked with The Dreamers Youth Group to produce text and cartoon stories that brought to life their refugee stories. The finished publication, which was distributed widely in local authorities and government circles is a complex record of some of their experiences.

*'The cartoon strips feature sadness, humour, ideas and at times a sharp critical confrontation of the British system'*⁷

Benefits and effect on Social Cohesion

Many of the group working on the project had never experienced such a powerful art form to express their ideas and thoughts.

*'Some even cited that in their homelands they would face a certain death if they undertook such a project'*⁸

It deals with the many complex issues that young asylum seekers and refugees face when they come to Britain, including racism, prejudice and tensions between different religions and cultures. It has made people think and is provocative in many ways, indeed it has caused some controversy in some circles due to the nature and content of the cartoons.

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⁶ Ryan, K, O'Neill Dr. M, Lake. A and Gent.P, (2004) 'Land of Dreams' Charnwood Arts. UK

⁷ ibid

⁸ ibid

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The conditions for creativity to flourish

In order to flourish, creative people need a number of specific conditions to be in place: a challenge that stretches their current abilities; the freedom to decide on the process they want to follow; the time to consider different approaches, to make mistakes and go up blind alleys; the necessary resources, whether that is money or equipment; and support. In considering groups of people working on creative projects, Teresa Amabile considers the importance of have a diverse team with different expertise where "ideas often combine and combust in exciting and useful ways" (the synthesis approach),⁹ for example a textile project in a predominantly Muslim school was led by an textile artist of mixed background. She found the input of one mother invaluable both to herself and the project. The mother came into school to demonstrate Mendhi, a traditional art, which many women from the sub continent use as a way of decorating the palms of their hands and feet and which the artist did not know about previously. The artist was then inspired to adapt this method for screen printing with the children¹⁰. Teresa Amabile, however, believes this is only the starting point. Group members must also share the same goals, be helpful through difficult periods and must not only recognise, but must value, the importance of the knowledge, skills and viewpoint of each of the other members.

In the Rootz case study in Coventry, Creative Partnerships is keen to foster engagement of practising artists from diverse backgrounds in partnership with schools and other artists, not only for the schools' benefit but also the artists themselves, as they feel different artists working together can inspire each other as well as the children.

ROOTZ

Age Group Targeted

Secondary school Yr 8 and GCSE drama students

Artform

Drama, art

Partnerships

Creative Partnerships Coventry

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

Frontline AV (an organisation specialising in arts from diverse backgrounds)

The Coventry Blue Coat Church of England School

Ernesford Grange School and Community College

Funding

Creative Partnerships £7000 for the pilot project

Heritage Lottery Fund £4000

In kind support from Belgrade and Frontline AV

⁹ Amabile, Theresa, 'How to Kill Creativity' in Henry, Jane (Ed) *Creative Management*, Sage Publications: London, pp4-10.

¹⁰ *Textiles for the Community – a case study of a multicultural creative textiles project in Leicester*, National Foundation for Arts Education

Background

The Rootz Diversity Festival had been operating for several years in Coventry and it was felt that with the launch of Creative Partnerships more work could be done around the Rootz project in schools to tackle intolerance. One of the schools taking part was a Church of England School, the other situated on the edge of the city had a predominantly white catchment area, but had had problems of tension and intolerance in the immediate geographic area which was more mixed.

Project Description

The aim of the project was to raise the children's awareness and understanding of other cultures living in Coventry and try to dispel racial discrimination. It was also to celebrate different cultures and give voice to people who are immigrants in a positive rather than angry way.

Artists held workshops in schools which looked at particular stories about people moving to live in Coventry from overseas. They then worked these into fictionalised stories about individuals, their culture, and why they moved to the area. The children created pieces of installation art in the form of a suitcase, which were filled with mementos from their chosen character's background. Each school then put on performances involving the characters that they had been working on. At the Bluecoat School this included a diverse mix of characters that were portrayed in drama, music and dance. At Ernesford Grange School they researched into the background of a young Asian woman and focused on her story in depth, covering issues such as arranged marriages.

To launch the project they held a Rootz Day Festival at one of the Schools, where they invited various artists to do workshops, presented a new piece of diverse theatre work, had African drumming sessions and provided food from different countries to stimulate the children's interest in different cultures and challenge their assumptions.

Benefits and effect on Social Cohesion

Tackling the issue of intolerance by personalising it for the children proved to be a good way to break down assumptions and increase understanding of different cultures as it humanised the stories. In the workshops an atmosphere of trust was sufficiently created to allow some of the children to talk about their direct experiences movingly and thereby gain the support of their peers.

Rootz was initially a pilot but gained such support from the schools that it is now in its second year and is being mainstreamed throughout at least one of the schools. Artists are utilising popular urban culture like hip/hop and R&B to give young people a sense of where they came from and get respect from other young people.

Success Factors

- The quality of the artists that worked with the school was fantastic thanks to the Belgrade and Frontline AV. It was important to work with a specialist in diverse arts.
- The commitment from the teachers throughout the school was important and has been a major factor in the continuation of the work after the pilot had finished
- The young people were very committed and the research work undertaken by them was excellent.
- Evaluations were undertaken of the programme by keeping track of the children's thoughts and all feedback has been very positive.

Limitations

- The initial Rootz project had a very short time scale as Creative Partnerships wanted to tie in with the wider Rootz Festival in Coventry. There was therefore little time to plan in a thorough evaluation.
- Opportunities to use the work across the curriculum have been problematical in one school as some staff were not fully engaged. Therefore the work has only involved the GCSE drama students.
- Arranging time to plan with teachers has also been difficult
- Creative Partnerships is still in its early days in Coventry and the concept of creative teaching is not yet fully understood in some schools. It is a different type of teaching and schools will need time to fully engage with it.

Next Steps

The Rootz project was a pilot project and has lead on to a longer running strand of work which has built in it an evaluation stream. At the Bluecoat School as part of their PSHE /citizenship work they plan to hold a Citizenship day in the summer term based on the diversity work. This will involve work across the curriculum. Specifically, the art department who are producing an art trail round the school and the English department who are looking at poetry from other cultures.

Creative Partnerships are fostering artists from diverse backgrounds to engage in projects in schools both for the sake of the artist and the children.

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As Bloomfield and Bianchini point out, this cannot be achieved without regular contact between individuals:

*"Only when people meet and mix in everyday life can they get to know and understand the needs and feelings of others and develop those 'moral sympathies for the other' on which shared civil life can grow. [it is important to]... promote interaction between different cultural groups to cultivate mutual respect and overcome the insensitivity and stereotyping that is a product of ignorance."*¹¹

And it is clear that where this does happen, in areas where diverse communities meet in an atmosphere of tolerance and openness, creativity flourishes.^{12,13} The Italian Renaissance benefited from the new ideas that merchants were bringing back from the Middle East, the great creativity of Shakespearean England came at a time when the country was exploring the globe.

In the Creative Partnerships case study Signs and Symbols - Africa and Islam below, much emphasis was placed on artists, teachers and other partners such as the museum service learning from each other about cultural diversity and

¹¹ Bloomfield, J and Bianchini, F, (2004), *Planning for the Intercultural City*, Comedia: UK

¹² Csikszentmihaly, Mihaly (1999), 'A Systems Perspective on Creativity', in Henry, Jane (Ed) *Creative Management*, Sage Publications: London, pp13-26

¹³ Florida, Richard (2002), *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Basic Books: USA

inspiring each other, both creatively and for their future cohesion work with children.

Signs and Symbols - Africa and Islam

Age Group Targeted

Primary School Year 2

Artform

Creative writing, animation

Partnerships

Creative Partnerships Manchester and Salford

Whitworth Arts Gallery

Manchester Museum

St Peters RC Primary School

Didsbury CE Primary School

Artists (writer, storey teller. Animator, musician, sound artist and video artist)

Funding

Creative Partnerships

Background

The aim of this Creative Partnership's project was to raise awareness of Islamic and African culture in two Christian schools and for pupils and staff to gain a greater awareness of their own cultural identity and cultural differences. A major objective of the project was to provide continuous professional development opportunities for the staff, artists and other partners to enable them to have the confidence and ability to address issues around cultural diversity within other projects and schools.

Project Description

The project worked with 3 groups of year 2 primary school children from two different schools. Collaborative creative writing and animation work was used to stimulate cross-curricular arts, history, geography, literacy, maths and RE work.

The project began with sessions at Manchester Museum and the Whitworth Art Gallery, looking at African and Islamic artefacts. Pupils created drawings exploring symbolism, pattern and colour inspired by the objects they had handled and this was followed by a question and answer sessions with curators. Children then worked with a writer, to use this experience as a catalyst for creating their own imaginative stories, which were developed into scripts, which related these experiences to pupil's own cultural environments. Pupils also worked with storyteller, to inspire the development of their own stories, around the popular 'Ananse' stories.

Children read and recorded their scripts with a "soundscape" background onto a CD and developed their own animated films. The films demonstrate their ideas around Africa and Islam, with children creating characters from abstract Islamic patterns. The films were screened and artwork and creative writing exhibited at a project celebration evening at the Whitworth Art Gallery, where over 180 people attended.

Professional development sessions were also provided for artists and teachers involved in the project, to improve skills in working with diversity and Islam issues. There were also mentoring sessions for practitioners involved in the

project to inspire them, encourage research and help to improve multi-cultural teaching practise.

Benefits and effect on Social Cohesion

The hands-on approach to African and Islamic artefacts, learning at a museum and a gallery, was highly effective for all children participating. Children were highly engaged and animated throughout these sessions, asking enthusiastic, intelligent questions and talking openly about their choices of objects.

Curators at both the gallery and museum would not normally deliver such sessions to primary aged children. The success of this work has given individual curators more confidence in working with these age groups and encouraged both institutions to consider future projects of this kind with primary schools.

Parental interest in the project was strong, and support for the final celebration event came from siblings, parents, friends and grandparents. Parents felt the project had been a great success.

Creative arts and cohesion

In Britain today there is a diverse range of cultures and faith groups, each with their own set of memes, which creates the perfect conditions both for conflict and enhanced creativity.

By using television to explore different faiths and explode myths and prejudices MATV Channel 6 was able to incorporate the music, dance and visual spectacle inherent in so many cultures.

Kaleidoscope

Age Group Targeted

Primary/secondary

Artform

Television, dance

Partnerships

MATV Channel 6 (A terrestrial Asian television channel for the people of Leicester. Also accessible on Sky network)

Leicester City Council

Sacred Heart Junior School and Bridge Junior School, Leicester

Funding

Leicester City Council

Background

Prompted by Leicester City Council, MATV set up a project to promote community cohesion in the city in association with the leaders and representatives of various faiths.

Project Description

Kaleidoscope was a series of 8, ½ hour programmes which looked specifically at community cohesion and involved all the different faiths in the city. The first 7 films were each dedicated to exploring one particular faith. They included film of the place of worship, music and visual arts from that particular faith and studio discussions involving a mix of people including each week some one from a youth group (14+). The final programme focused on a project initiated by the

Haymarket Theatre involving two primary schools, one a Catholic school the other with a preponderance of Asian and other children of a multi ethnic background. 20 children from each school met together during a lunch time club and Saturday morning club, where they were involved in arts activities including dance and visual arts using faith symbols. During the Kaleidoscope programme the children outlined what they had been doing and talked about how they had made new friends with people they had known nothing about. The programmes were aired on MATV Channel 6 at the end of November/December 2005 and have been seen in colleges and schools in Leicester.

Benefits and effect on Social Cohesion

The use of television to air discussions about faith and visually explore places of worship helped to break down myths surrounding different cultures. Many people had never been inside other places of worship and the programme opened the door and helped break down barriers.

There had previously been some friction between the schools and this project helped raise awareness and understanding not just of the children who made new friendships but of the parents as well, who having seen their children on television, began to interact with each other.

Success Factors

- There were over 200 participants in the making of the programmes and because of this level of input and engagement the series was really able to focus on the key issues that came out from the different communities
- People engaged with the project as it gave them a channel through which to express themselves. They hadn't previously known where to get heard.

Limitations

- Community cohesion is difficult to portray on television and make exciting, the input of the young people helped the programmes come alive.
- As people get older they hold more conviction in their views and are therefore harder to talk to about interfaith cohesion and more difficult to get to interact with another faith. Primary school children were keen and eager to explore new attitudes.
- Time

Next Steps

MATV Channel 6 would like to undertake a further series of programmes looking at the issue in more depth and utilising events and activities to encourage people to come together and also place a greater focus on work in school. They feel that having studied primary children they would like to look at older children to see how quickly attitudes are formed.

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The creative methodologies discussed above and the case studies rely on having knowledge of the topic in hand, for example, technical skills in painting or film making, combined with the ability to see things from different perspectives.

Creativity is enhanced in environments of trust, as openness to new ideas or perspectives is essential to break out of the standard patterns of thinking. It is no surprise that artists are often to be found living in cities and regions that have diverse and tolerant populations.¹⁴

There must be a balance though between arts for arts sake and art used to affect peoples lives. In the case studies we find that art and creativity are used as a tool, often alongside or in partnership with other equally useful tools, such as sport, to break down barriers and tensions and promote cohesion.

*'An arts strategy is about change/challenging the status quo. It is an opportunity for people to convey expression, vision, overcome fear and explore new ideas.'*¹⁵

*'It's not just about improving art work but using arts to tackle subjects within the curriculum and make them relevant in this case to cultural tolerance. The arts are a great way of engaging people across the board and increasing confidence'*¹⁶

Creative arts are uniquely well placed to support work in interfaith cohesion:

- They don't have to rely on language. This may be important if faith groups are first generation immigrants. The Land of Dreams cartoon project above builds on this by using cartoons to explore individual refugee's personal narratives. The use of a visual form not only allowed them to share their experiences whatever their abilities in English, but it also helped to develop their understanding of British culture as some were sure that they would not have been allowed to undertake this art work in their homelands.
- Language is tool for discussing rational ideas. Faith and creativity are more closely allied to our emotions and are often better expressed using other creative forms, such as visual art, music or dance, as a way of tapping into intuitive understanding and expertise.¹⁷ Two individuals from different faiths may well recognise the devotional emotion in a painting or composition, whilst having little knowledge of the central tenets of the others religion. The Babington Multifaith video uses the visual arts as a starting point for understanding of different religions (see case study below).
- Faith often uses the creative arts as a teaching aid, so it is well understood across faith groups, although the specific cultural forms (memes) may be different.
- The diversity of each faith group's memes is likely to support creativity through synergies, or reframing of problems.
- The creative arts tend not to have right or wrong answers, so it may be easier to develop an atmosphere of openness and tolerance.
- The arts help to create safe spaces in which dialogue can take place but at the same time allow people to challenge the current thinking, explore barriers and come up with a vision for the future.

Multifaith Babington

Age Group Targeted

Secondary School. Yrs. 8/9/10

¹⁴ Florida, Richard (2002), *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Basic Books: USA

¹⁵ Ryan, Kevan (2006), Charnwood Arts

¹⁶ Kate Attard, Creative Partnerships Coventry

¹⁷ Claxton, Guy (2001), 'The Innovative Mind', in Henry, Jane (Ed) *Creative Management*, Sage Publications: London, pp29-43

Artform

Digital arts/ textiles

Partnerships

Soft Touch Arts, Babington College Leicester

Funding

Neighbourhood Renewal Funding approx £35,000 over 2 years

Background

Following an influx of Somalian refugees into Leicester, a school with a traditionally white catchment area was struggling to integrate the different nationalities and cultures and had found that the changed situation had resulted in tension in school.

Multifaith Babington was part of the wider arts programme, known as "the welcome project" with the main aim of promoting integration. The interfaith work was one of the ways Soft Touch Arts tried to integrate the new students of different cultures/religions into the school.

Project Description

A group of young people representing the 4 major faiths in the school worked together to produce a teaching resource for use in the RE Department. Working alongside the RE Teacher, Soft Touch Arts took the group on trips to places of worship where they took digital photos, video and conducted interviews. The group used this material to create the DVD which is now used in RE lessons. The DVD contains a video tour of the places of worship, a key beliefs slideshow and the young people talking about their religion. Not only is this shown/discussed during RE lessons but is played during lunch times and break times on audio visual equipment around the school to raise awareness amongst all students.

Two further projects were carried out by Soft Touch Arts with aim of raising awareness and understanding of different cultures within the school. One with the technology department involved students creating a banner that utilised and showed different textile techniques from different ethnic backgrounds. The other with geography department involved students creating a video about areas of the city of Leicester where they live, this included visualising the predominant culture and religion of the area.

Benefits and effect on Social Cohesion

The aim of the project was to reduce tensions and raise awareness and understanding of different faiths. The project achieved this aim, not only with the group taking part in production of the video but also for the wider school through the use of the DVD. According to the evaluation of the teachers, students involved had higher levels of esteem following the project and a raised level of educational attainment

Success Factors

- Soft Arts already had a programme of work on the estates where the young people came from and knew and had the trust of the people they worked with.
- The children involved had access to state of the art technical equipment, which not only made them look cool in the eyes of the other students but gave them an opportunity to develop a skill that they would not otherwise have done

- It was a sustained two year programme, which meant that Soft Arts had the opportunity to sit down with the teacher and plan in the longer term to meet the needs of the school
- Whilst the majority of the project was carried out during lesson time, some involvement by the student outside school hours was required. This resulted in more commitment from the students.

Limitations

- Difficulties getting people to come forward from certain faiths, particularly Christians
- There is a difficulty attracting funding for projects like this as funders tend to believe that schools already have a budget for this type of work.
- Gaining commitment from other teachers not involved directly in the project was problematical.
- The project in itself was difficult to measure, so the evaluation tried to address curricular targets.
- Contacting teachers and finding time for planning meetings was challenging as teachers already have a full time table.

Next Steps

Soft Touch Arts are continuing their relationship with the school with ongoing projects. They view the Multifaith Project as a pilot and hope to roll it out in other schools.

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Using the creative arts to support interfaith cohesion

Belief and creativity share certain characteristics: they are intuitive, non-rational parts of human nature that allow us to understand the world differently. It is no surprise that the arts are used in all religions to enhance understanding and teach the next generation. This similarity offers the opportunity for different faith groups to share insights that other, more rational approaches, may miss.

The case studies also highlight the importance of process to interfaith work in the creative arts: it is the act of striving to understand other perspectives that leads to understanding and creativity that is important here rather than the quality of the final artwork.

Resources

Websites

www.interfaith.org.uk On their home page you will find a link to the 'Connect' interfaith resource for young people which features different case studies

www.diversityanddialogue.org.uk : a project which aims to bring young people from different faiths together

<http://connectingcommunities.charnwood-arts.org.uk>

<http://www.charnwoodarts.com>

Living in a Multifaith Society – A trail around the British Museum

Full trail will soon be available online on the British Museum compass website
www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

DVDs

'Multifaith Babington'

'Key beliefs slideshow'

'Take a look around'

all available from Soft Touch Arts, T:0116 270 2706, E. vince@soft-touch.org.uk

Kaleidoscope 8 television programmes about different faiths + accompanying booklet

Available from MATV Channel 6, Falguni Naik, T 0116 253 2288, E. falguni@sapne.fsnet.co.uk

Publications

Land of Dreams – new arrivals in Charnwood

Whose Land is it Anyway – Connecting communities – resolving differences in Charnwood

Both published by Charnwood Arts 2004 and available from Charnwood Arts, T. 01509 822558, E. kev@charnwood-arts.org.uk