

**UNESCO Meeting of Experts on Arts Education in Latin America and the
Caribbean – University of Uberaba, October 2001-11-21**

Presentation of the Purcell School, London

**“IMPULSE” – A CASE STUDY ON THE PARTICIPATION OF
COMMUNITY ARTISTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS**

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1. Introduction

Over the past twelve months the Purcell School has been undertaking a project which provides an illustration of one of the main topics for discussion of this meeting, the “participation of community artists in the educational process”. We have developed programmes in which, under the tutelage of the professional musicians, our own students have then acted as mentors and tutors to the pupils in the community. We hope it will be of wider interest in that the project has had as one of its objectives the creation on links between pupils and artists with a view to developing their creative thinking, one of the purposes of this very meeting.

Before describing the project in detail, you must first understand a little about the Purcell School and we will put it into context by giving you a brief overview of some recent thinking that has taken place in the UK on the issue of creative and cultural education.

2. The Purcell School

The Purcell School is a specialist music school (for ages 8-18), one of just four in the UK. Entry is by instrumental audition and we accept only those who are of outstanding musical talent. We also recognise an obligation that the special musical resource which the School represents should also benefit the wider community. We have been exploring how best to achieve this in the context of passing on our expertise to local community schools. The key feature of the projects we are carrying out in this area is the collaboration between professional musicians, our own musically advanced students and the pupils in the participating local schools.

3. Creative and Cultural Education

The issue of creative and cultural education has provoked much discussion at national level in the UK, where in recent years the content and delivery of the national curriculum for schools has been a subject of intense debate. In 1998 the UK Government established a National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education to make recommendations on the creative and cultural development of young people and make proposals for principles, policy and practice. The Committee comprised scientists, artists, educators, business leaders – even two well known comic actors – and took as its premise a concept of creativity that recognised the significance of creative achievement not just for the arts but for *all* fields of human activity. Creative and cultural education are not viewed as distinct subjects but as general functions of education, relevant to all curriculum areas and all teachers.

The report of the Committee¹ called for a national strategy in creative and cultural education and made recommendations to improve education in these areas and raise the quality and standards of education as a whole. It considered creative abilities as being fundamental in meeting the *economic* challenge of developing in young people the skills, knowledge and personal qualities needed in a world where work is undergoing rapid and long-term change. It identified creative and cultural education as tools in meeting the *technological* challenge of enabling young people to make their way with confidence and explore their own creative potential in a world that is being shaped by technologies which are evolving more quickly than ever before, the *social* challenge of providing ways for young people to engage with issues of social change, and the *personal* challenge of developing the unique capacities of all young people to provide a basis on which they can build purposeful and fulfilling lives. These are all themes which seem very much to coincide with UNESCO's concerns in this area².

What is creative education? It is “developing young people’s capacities for original ideas and action”, using the techniques and skills not only of the discipline in question, but also the freedom to experiment, to use imagination and judge value. And by “culture” we refer not to a certain type of art (e.g. “high” culture or “popular” culture), but to “the shared values and patterns of behaviour that characterise different social groups and communities”. Cultural education should enable young people to understand and explore their own cultural assumptions and values, embrace and understand cultural diversity, and develop a historical perspective which relates contemporary values to the processes which have shaped them.

Creative learning requires creative teaching. And this is where we believe the case study presented below has particular significance. Teachers need the freedom to innovate, to use imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting and

¹ “All Our Futures: creativity, culture & education”, Department for Education and Employment (summary published by the National Campaign for the Arts)

² See e.g. UNESCO paper on “Education of arts in the school environment”

effective, to develop young people's own creative thinking, stimulate curiosity and raise self-esteem and confidence.

But schools alone cannot provide all the educational experiences needed and partnerships between schools and outside organisations and individuals are essential. The participation of artists in the educational process is therefore fundamental. The NACCCE report identified two types of partnership, both of which have particular resonance for the Purcell School's project: cooperation between groups of schools, particularly specialist schools, and wider collaborations bringing together, amongst others, arts agencies and education institutions. The "Impulse" project involved the specialist Purcell School with local primary schools and was funded by an award from a national scheme encouraging the participation of artists in residence in the community.

4. Case Study -

IMPULSE

Exploring creative musical interaction between African and European cultural traditions

Participants

Professional African musicians - Tunde Jegede and Eugene Skeef

Young musicians from the Purcell School of Music

Children from local primary schools

INTRODUCTION

This project was devised in an attempt to address a number of issues about which have been of concern for some time now.

1) Many schools do not have adequate resources nor the necessary expertise to implement musical provision for their pupils, and do not know how to set things in motion in this respect.

2) Pupils with exceptional talent AND pupils with learning difficulties can feel isolated from others for different reasons. This project sought to integrate such pupils and enable them to work together in the creation of a piece of music.

3) Professional composers and musicians can create an enormous impact in schools, especially when they perform with the children or directly interact with them in other ways.

4) Different cultural traditions can enhance one another, and can open new doors for performers and composers alike.

The project 'IMPULSE' sought to address some of these issues. It was organised by Alison Cox, the School's Head of Composition, at the Purcell School with the

aid of a special scheme launched in England at the millennium entitled 'Year of the Artist'. In the year 2000, a thousand artists were commissioned to work in communities right across the country. These included composers, visual artists, sculptors, poets, dancers.....etc. Our project 'IMPULSE' was one of these, and we received the funding needed to implement it.

A project such as this has to be simple to administer, flexible enough to accommodate differences, and to provide a clear framework for effective performance without compromising creativity too much. It also needs very careful administration and coordination, and it is always a good idea to have one person who has an overview of the whole thing.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Two professional African musicians worked with pupils from the Purcell School and children from local primary schools to create a piece of music in layers. Everybody helped to create the piece and everybody performed in it. The piece was performed in the primary school at the end of the second day to an audience of pupils, parents and friends. We ran the project five times, using a different primary school and different Purcell pupils every time.

Step 1 - a number of primary schools were invited to participate. We were inundated, and five schools were selected for us to work with out of about fifty who wished to be involved. It was endeavoured to choose schools who did not have musical provision for their pupils, because these pupils were likely to receive most benefit.

Step 2 - the participating schools were visited beforehand and we discussed how they wanted to use the project to enhance other areas of the curriculum (for

example, one school decided to do a geographical study of Africa, and another school studied and created African masks in their Art lessons).

Step 3 - On the first morning of the project, the professional musicians arrived at the Purcell School and worked with the young instrumentalists teaching them African rhythms and melodic patterns with which the pupils created their own material, using their own (Western) instruments. They also learned different performing techniques and how to listen and respond.

Step 4 - In the afternoon of the first day the professional musicians went to the primary school and worked with the children there using traditional African instruments and school percussion. Again, the children learned some African rhythms and melodic patterns but much simpler ones, and created music in small groups using what they had learned.

Step 5 - On the second day of the project the professional musicians and the Purcell pupils all went to the primary school to meet the children. Everyone sat in a circle, and listened to the music that had been created on day 1. Small groups of Purcell pupils and primary children performed in turn

Step 6 - The African musicians then began to put it all together into one large piece. Purcell pupils helped the primary school children to develop their pieces. By the afternoon, the piece was ready to perform.

Step 7 - THE CONCERT. This took place at the end of the school day, in the school hall. Parents came to pick up their children and stayed to hear it. Other children and teachers in the school came to listen.

The concert consisted of a piece in 3 layers

Layer 1 - Primary school children playing simple patterns and their own music on school percussion with some African instruments

Layer 2 - Purcell pupils playing their own instruments, performing more difficult material, fitting against the music played by the children

Layer 3 - The professional African musicians performing very elaborate material, fitting against all the other music.

The final performances were always very impressive, and the young primary children enjoyed working with more experienced performers. There was a role for everyone - even those who had never performed before.

Afterwards we asked people for comments, and the feedback was amazing. Everyone (almost without exception) wanted more!!

Here are some of the comments from the children

'Absolutely brilliant' '....I didn't want it to end' '.....It was the best thing ever' '...I learned to drum with my elbow' '.....the Purcell pupils played really well and made our piece sound nice' '.....I loved the big bangy wooden thing' and so on. These are just a few of the hundreds of similar comments that I have received.

5. Conclusion

As far as we aware, this project is a completely new kind of interaction between performers of different levels of ability. It can involve any number of participants, is flexible enough to be adapted to any situation, culture or educational environment, and is very straightforward to implement. We should very much like to develop it elsewhere with the support of UNESCO, and hope that you will be able to use it in some way.

We believe this mode of delivery of creative education provides mutual benefits: at the same time as benefiting from the opportunity of working with professional musicians, the pupils from the community are able to collaborate with our students with whom they can easily identify and who may act as role models; our own students gain invaluable experience in learning how to share their talents, a process which leads to important self examination of their own creative processes.

“What the artist transmits to the child is a concrete and living relationship with a cultural activity, a knowledge and a know-how emanating from a sensitivity, long familiarity and experience...The artist as an individual anchored in the aesthetic tradition is at once both entrusted with a tradition and is a vehicle for creative ability”³. While the students of the Purcell School may not have the same depth of know-how or length of familiarity as practising professional artists, our project has shown that they to can be perfect “vehicles for creative ability”.

We hope that the collaborative nature of these projects and the focus on encouraging talented pupils to take part in the delivery of the educational objectives themselves will be of interest to others.

³ Ibid p.3