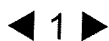


THE GROUNDSWELL
PROJECT:

THE IMPACT OF ARTISTS IN SCHOOLS

The Groundswell Project is the result of a successful lottery bid made to the Arts Council of England by the Devon Arts in Schools Initiative. The project was launched in October 1998, with a wide-ranging programme of activities running through to March 2001; its focus is the work of artists in schools. As the programme moves into its later stages, DAISI is in the process of reviewing what has been learned so far, and looking ahead to see what might be carried forward into the future. This paper, by Nick Jones, looks at some of the patterns that have emerged to date, focusing on the impact of artists on pupils' learning. For those unfamiliar with DAISI's work, the first two sections explain the background.



THE DAISI PARTNERSHIP

The Devon Arts in Schools Initiative began in 1995 as a small-scale, independent venture by members of the Devon Association of Governors, leading to a partnership involving Devon County Council (through its arts officer and curriculum advisers), local headteachers' associations, and local artists, represented by Devon Arts Forum.

The award of an 'Arts for Everyone' lottery grant led to DAISI's establishment as an independent charity, and opened up the possibility of significant activity

in the arts-education field. The Groundswell budget has included some £70,000 in fees and commissions paid directly to artists. The project has been largely innovative, building on accumulated experience to devise and refine models of externally-funded artist-in-school activities. As it has developed, The Groundswell programme has provided opportunities to evaluate a variety of approaches to the arts in education, and the impact of such work on the creativity of students. It is this range of activity that has enabled the charity to fulfil its constitutional aim of 'enriching education through the arts'.

Both Devon LEA and South West Arts were immediately supportive of the DAISI partnership and its emerging aims, both philosophically and financially. But neither was an initiator, and DAISI operates independently of its major interest groups. The prominence of Governors within the constitution means the organisation remains rooted in the school context.

Along with this independence has gone a whole-hearted commitment to partnership. The positive nature of DAISI's relations with each of its partner groups (schools, artists, arts organisations, advisers, the LEA) has been carefully nurtured, and 'the spirit of cooperation' is one of the organisation's core values. The interim report commended the supportiveness of DAISI's project management, and the sense of collaborative adventure which the project has generated.

For many teachers, the Groundswell Project has succeeded in reaffirming values which might otherwise have become submerged: what one teacher described as 'the chance to cling onto what is best in children's education in the flood of legislation, paperwork and data.' DAISI's current development plan, under the strapline 'creativity in and out of school', identifies three strategic priorities: to encourage more schools to work with professional artists; to support teachers in enhancing the arts curriculum; and to develop DAISI's role as an arts education agency. The plan looks beyond the end of the present lottery funding, and considers practical ways of building on the partnerships established, and the work so far achieved.

THE GROUNDSWELL PROJECT

The Groundswell programme is made up of ten separate art projects, each centered on a different art-form or combination of art-forms, and each following a different pattern of artist involvement. In summary the ten projects are as follows:

Art & Craft Residencies: a series of artist residencies, involving work in ceramics, textiles, and other media, often linked to other art-forms, such as storytelling.

Dance Workshops: three dance companies, each working with a range of schools and with Devon Youth Dance through the 3D dance network, to create and perform new pieces.

Contemporary Art Exhibitions: four exhibitions, in different venues, of art works chosen by pupils and teachers, linked to a programme of school and gallery workshops run by the artists, and the creation of a permanent collection of art-works appealing to 3-11 year-olds.

Puppetry Project: two companies, each working in three schools over three weeks to enable pupils to devise, make and perform puppet shows.

Contemporary Voices: a diverse series of poets working with students from different age groups in a variety of workshop contexts.

New Theatre Festival: three new short plays commissioned from three playwrights and performed separately by eighteen different primary schools in three venues.

Song Cycles: three composers, each working with one secondary and two primary schools in different parts of the county, to create and perform a sequence of music in response to the same commissioned poem.

Physical Theatre Workshops: three companies working with Devon Youth Theatre and students with hearing impairments, from workshop to performance.

Film Project: a film-maker working with secondary pupils to create a digital video-film on the impact of professional artists working in schools.

Masque: a variety of artists collaborating with five secondary schools to produce a multi-art-form performance piece.

The scale of the project has been considerable. By March 2000, DAISI had worked with 60 individual artists and 10 companies, and with almost 4,000 pupils from 160 of Devon's primary, secondary and special schools – over half the schools in the county.

The project's interim report, published in May 2000, evaluated a sample of completed art-form projects, and assessed the progress to date against the full range of Groundswell objectives. The evaluation was based on the substantial evidence of reported observations, feedback forms, review meetings, and individual testimony.

Groundswell is in part a research project: DAISI has committed itself strongly to the principle of reflective practice, to thinking about the differences between art-forms, and the relative value of different forms of artist activity. As the programme moves into its later stages it is important to focus on what is transferable in all this, on what DAISI can carry forward into its subsequent work. It is also worth reflecting upon the underlying values on which the project is built. Why *is* it a good thing for artists to work in schools?

This paper looks at two of the patterns emerging from the Groundswell Project to date. Section 3 looks briefly at patterns of artistic process, or student and artist activity. Section 4 looks at the pattern of outcomes, in terms of experiences gained. A final section identifies some of the questions arising from the findings to date.

◀ 3 ▶ PATTERNS OF ACTIVITY

Each element of the Groundswell project brings pupils into direct contact with artists and their work. It also enables them to engage with the artistic *process*.

One way of thinking of this process is in terms of four separate roles, which we could set out like this:

MAKER – PERFORMER – [WORK] – AUDIENCE – CRITIC

Broadly speaking, the first two roles are productive or creative (we think of both makers and performers as creative artists), and the last two are receptive, or responsive. That's a simplification, and the roles connect and overlap in ways which vary from art-form to art-form. But it helps us to focus on the range of activities which the process involves.

The *maker* (composer, writer, creator) understands the medium in which he or she works, and the traditions surrounding it. Makers use that understanding to create either a material object, or a work in some notational form, such as a playscript, or a musical score.

If a work is notational, it remains incomplete – it needs a *performer* who can 'real-ise' the work, converting it into something which can be experienced directly by an audience. In some contexts (like jazz), maker and performer are one, while in others (like painting) there is no element of performance at all.

Thirdly, any performance needs an *audience*. It's easy to see this role as a passive one, but you need to learn to be an audience. The good audience (or we could say viewer, or spectator, or reader) attends to the work, and responds to it thoughtfully and with feeling. The audience tries to make connections between the work and the world it knows.

Finally there is the *critic* – or we might prefer to say commentator, or reviewer, or academic. The role of the critic is always optional. But what the critic does is to contextualise, interpret, compare and evaluate the work, and communicate this understanding – to makers, to performers, to audiences. What critics bring with them, most significantly, is cultural knowledge.

Now the educational system has tended to privilege this final role above the others – the study of literature, for example, from Literacy Hour to PhD, aims

to produce capable critics, rather than creative writers. But it's difficult to be a good critic, in any art-form, unless you have a real understanding of the process as a whole. Pupils usually come to art through recordings or reproductions of various kinds – in the form of curriculum data – which in itself invites a kind of detachment. But when you bring a practising artist into the equation, the process takes on a new dimension. There is cultural interaction.

Scanning the Groundswell programme as whole, we could say that the basic Groundswell 'template' includes something like the following elements:

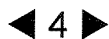
- ▶ A *performance or exhibition* of an artist's own work.
- ▶ An element of *contextualisation*: the artist explains and demonstrates how the work came about.
- ▶ A workshop: pupils *practise* the art-form in collaboration with the artist.
- ▶ A *performance or exhibition* of the pupils' work generated by the workshop, often in an out-of-school environment.
- ▶ An element of *reflection*: the pupils (and if possible the artist) discuss and evaluate what they have created.

At the heart of any Groundswell experience is the workshop, and the work it produces. But it's the surrounding elements which help the pupils to make sense of what they are doing, and why they are doing it, and the effect it might have. Not all Groundswell's art-form projects have involved all five elements, and certainly not in equal measure – but the evidence suggests that if any one of these elements is missing, the experience will be the weaker for it.

What seems to be most interesting in terms of the pupils' learning, is that this pattern of activity involves *moving between* roles – both for the artist (who also acts, for example, as audience and critic), and for the pupils, who may begin as spectators, before becoming makers and performers themselves. And it's this flexibility of role that helps the pupils to see how one part of the artistic process relates to another.

The more extended a project over time, the more flexible the pattern becomes, and also the more the teacher is likely to become engaged in the process as a whole. In an extended project, and this is where the element of professional development has

occurred most strongly, the teacher might be seen as understudying, or collaborating in, the artist's role.



PATTERNS OF EXPERIENCE

From their engagement in this process, out of this shifting exploration of roles, what is it that pupils take away? What are the gains that this kind of project can bring?

This section outlines a number of things which pupils seem to get out of the experience of working with an artist, based on the steadily accumulating evidence of Groundswell feedback to date. These ideas come both from the pupils themselves, and from their teachers – often from both. Some are 'learning outcomes' which any curriculum would recognise; others are to do with wider aspects of personal and social development. All have been reported across art-form projects.

► A change of ethos

At its simplest, this is about the buzz pupils get from doing something outside of the normal school routine, which in itself increases the chance that the experience will be remembered. It includes a 'celebrity' element – *'having a live author in our school'* – and that sense of occasion which can also become a difference of mood: *'Thank you for doing the assembly'*, wrote one primary pupil to a visiting African drummer, *'it was much better than usual – especially the teachers dancing.'*

But it's also, very often, about a different and more equal kind of working relationship: pupils and artists as co-workers. Pupils involved in the Puppetry project, for example, appreciated *'the way we were treated as equals'*, while their teacher noted how *'everybody is made to feel important, and everybody's work is valued.'*

Another aspect of that relationship – perhaps likelier in the secondary context – is a quality of openness in the kinds of conversation that take place. Secondary students working with one visiting poet liked *'the way she was free about everything'*, and *'the way she was willing to open up to us.'* The role of teacher and the role of pupil are often polarised, but artists are not a part of that system. Pupils like to be treated as if they were older. And there are understandable reasons why teachers may underestimate pupils' actual maturity. During the Song Cycles project, one teacher of a Year 10 group wrote

'having known these students since Y7, it was fascinating to realise how mature they had become.'

► The challenge of the real

Taking on challenges is a double-edged business. *'I enjoyed doing it because it was fun and hard,'* wrote one pupil, linking two ideas which we tend not to put together. Or *'I liked doing the performance because it was fun. It also took a lot of courage.'*

The experience of working to deadlines, and of presenting to real audiences in real venues, greatly sharpens the sense of purpose – a kind of simulated professionalism. *'I was shocked when I heard that we were making puppets,'* wrote one Key Stage 2 pupil. *'What shocked me most was when I heard we were making these puppets to do a puppet show!'*

But meeting such a challenge successfully builds real confidence, and this too contributes to the sense of being grown-up. One young puppeteer ended his letter to the company: *'Thanks to John for getting us through this.'* At the other end of the age-range, the group of sixth-formers who produced a CD of their own poems felt a similar combination of nervousness and excitement.

Live performances, in particular, are likely to produce that sense of challenge, with the vivid awareness that things could indeed go wrong. *'As we walked on I felt my insides churn up, but as soon as I said my opening lines I knew that it was going to be OK, and I began to relax and enjoy myself,'* wrote one of the young performers in the New Theatre Festival. As a headteacher working on the same project later reflected, *'You reach the point where there's nothing you can do. They're on stage. It's all down to them. As teachers we find it hard to let go sometimes.'*

► The pleasure of collaboration

'One thing that really shone out for me was the development of teamwork. The children have not been very good at cooperating with each other in the past, but on this project they worked together in groups and really supported each other'. Or again: 'It was excellent for the children to work as a team – an experience that rarely occurs.'

Working as a team – and some art-forms absolutely demand this – both increases social confidence and cooperation skills, and is in itself a pleasurable experience. Inclusiveness gives such collaboration a particular value, as when one KS3 pupil listed as the best thing about a dance project: *'joining in with able-bodied people and feeling part of a group.'*

The art-form itself can be a strong factor: what one teacher referred to as *'the decorums of drama – waiting your turn etc'*. It may also be that a visiting company of three or four artists is able to model groupwork for the pupils, where teachers can only model working in isolation.

Collaboration, of course, can also be with the artists themselves – *'We couldn't have done it without you'* wrote one young pupil to the musician-composer with whom she had worked on the Song Cycles. And collaboration relates also to 'ethos', in that it involves a degree of openness and respect for others' ideas – the more 'open' things are, the more you are likely to have the confidence to propose ideas of your own.

There's also the simple element of companionship, particularly where individual pupils meet up with others who share the same interest. This was the case, for example, with a group of post-16 students from different schools who worked together on the Contemporary Voices project: *'It gave me a chance to express myself with a group of like-minded people, something which rarely happens as a teenager. It is hard to find others interested in poetry.'*

► Gains in cultural knowledge

Working with an artist almost inevitably introduces pupils to new areas of cultural experience. It may involve getting to know more about the work of a particular individual – *'The best thing was when the man showed us all the photographs of his life's work'* – or about a whole tradition. It has been one of the principles of the Groundswell Project to encourage encounters with unfamiliar cultures, through, for example, *'first-hand experience of Nigerian culture, stories and songs, and a chance to work with clay*

using Nigerian modelling techniques.' Here the development may be as much personal as it is artistic, as with the pupil who explained *'My Mum's half African, so meeting a total African meant a lot to me.'*

But contextualising an artist's work also draws pupils into an engagement with what the work is about, with understanding an artist's ideas. Cultural differences can be challenging, whether or not they involve differences of place or ethnicity. One composer found that in the secondary school in which he was working, the students tended to have *'fixed ideas about what music could and could not be. They were reluctant to try anything too experimental. I like to think the experience of the project has helped to free up some of their intransigent attitudes to music.'*

Such an experience allows pupils to become more responsive audiences, and also to move from audience to criticism. It may also raise interest in attending galleries, theatres and other venues. And cultural knowledge increases exponentially – the more you know about, the more connections you are able to make.

PHOTOGRAPHS

p2: Bidwell Brook Special School working with Heritage Ceramics

p4: Pilton Community College & Pathfield Special School working with Candoco Dance

p5: Holsworthy Community College working with composer Pete Rosser (Photo: April Doubleday)

p6: Millwater Special School, working with photographer Simon Gray, and an exhibition by James Ravilious.

p7: Broadhempston Primary School at an 'Inspirations' exhibition of contemporary art (Sculptor: Taja).

► Acquisition of art-form skills

This is where the art process gets practical – ‘*I liked it when you got to have a go*’ wrote a nine-year-old who had sat through a lengthy period of contextualisation – but it’s also about making connections between what you have heard talked about, and the medium you are using. ‘*I liked the different textures of the music*’, wrote one young pupil – a word we might guess she had heard, rather than seen, and a useful way of articulating a newly perceived difference. Or: ‘*I’d never really considered the shape of a poem before, but now it’s a priority of mine to see how the page physically looks*’.

By acquiring or enhancing such skills, pupils become better makers or performers. Their success can be tested, and there are often direct curriculum benefits. It’s an area that secondary teachers in particular have tended to emphasise.

One key thing is how far these skills are transferable into other contexts. Following the Song Cycles project, Year 5 pupils who had been working with a poet and a composer were asked: If your teacher asked you to compose a new song, can you think of two things you might do? One replied: ‘*I would get Roselle to come and help me with the words, and I would get Philip to put a rhythm to it.*’ – then added, ‘*But if I could not get them, I’d do it myself.*’ Another pupil, equally resourceful, wrote: ‘*I would do a remix of ‘Wild Wild West’ ... and at least then I would have the right tools in my head.*’

► Inspiration

Where teachers have tended to emphasise gains in skills, pupils often think more in terms of inspiration. Asked what she had learned from a project, one older student wrote ‘*not exactly learned – but new energy and ideas.*’

An artist’s passion and enthusiasm for a chosen art-form can be catching. It makes people want to try it for themselves. Even the secondary pupil who wrote: ‘*I learned that writing poems is not as bad as you think*’ was showing a glimmer of this.

Pupils have been attracted by the power of artists’ ideas, and have been admiring of their skills. ‘*I thought you were fantastic on the saxophone*’, wrote the primary pupil who had been proud to play alongside a skilled musician. Older students found in one workshop tutor ‘*a genuine love of art which can only infuse others with the desire to write.*’

As much as any of the gains listed here, inspiration really needs evaluating in the longer term: will those involved be inspired to do this again, on their own initiative? So where projects have developed a longer time-scale, it’s encouraging to find comments like: ‘*I didn’t write any poetry before the first workshop. Since then I have written quite a lot.*’ This is certainly one of the attractions of an extended project. As an older student wrote of one visiting artist: ‘*I think that now he has aroused my interest he is obliged to return.*’

► The experience of creativity

‘*The chance to be creative ran through everything,*’ wrote one headteacher following the Puppetry Project. Creativity goes to the heart of Groundswell, but it’s not an easy concept to get a handle on – partly because it overlaps with so much else, and partly because pupils tend not to describe their experiences in quite that way. Creativity has nonetheless emerged as a key term in current educational debate – at least partly because of a growing sense that it’s something which the formal curriculum is in danger of losing altogether.

Feedback to date suggests that in the Groundswell context there are at least three dimensions to creativity – it may actually be that we are dealing with more than one topic here, or it may be that creative experience is about some combination of the three.

The first of these dimensions is what is usually referred to as **problem-solving** – ingenuity, lateral thinking, the ability to come up with ‘imaginative solutions’ to specific practical difficulties. Groundswell projects have been rich in opportunities of this

kind: 'Most of all I liked making the pull-string that worked the tail because I liked joining it all up and trying to think of a way to make it work.'

But as the NACCCE report¹ underlines, 'Creativity and problem-solving are not the same thing' – it's sometimes just as important to discover that there *is* a problem, as it is to nail a solution. In the arts context in particular, creativity also implies an element of **personal imagination** – using the symbolic language of an art-form to express an idea, making connections across different areas of individual experience. This is perhaps doubly important given the barrenness of the present curriculum and its assessment processes in relation to the affective domain.

When Key Stage 3 pupils on a Contemporary Voices workshop wrote about 'the other me', an observer noted that *'the change of perspective, linked to the personal subject-matter, meant that some of the writing here was both startlingly confessional and also interestingly detached, and so protected'*. Also important here is pupils' capacity for empathy in an imagined situation. In the primary schools' New Theatre project, where pupils were asked to advise the playwright on how to end the new play, one wrote thoughtfully: *'I want there to be a happy part of the ending and a bad part of the ending, because our class has mixed feelings.'*

A third aspect of creativity, and this is one which artists themselves have tended to emphasise, we might call **risk-taking**. As temporary visitors, artists can afford to live dangerously – *'riding the edge of chaos'* as one artist put it, taking what another described as *'a free approach, allowing a degree of chance and uncontrolled events'*. At the same time, artists know (or quickly find out) that *'teachers aren't used to working in that way'*: for the front-line teacher, there is quite enough chaos in the job already, thank you, without going looking for more.

But for the pupils there are strong creative possibilities in *'breaking down barriers and opening ears and minds to unconventional uses of instruments and voices'*, as one teacher put it. It may translate into something as simple as *'I learned that pictures don't have to be neat to be good'*, or being more ambitious, or crossing curriculum boundaries – artists tend not to think of experience, as teachers are now largely compelled to do, in terms of ten separate subjects. In any event, taking a risk is about being relatively unpredictable: about surprising yourself – at the very least – with the creation that emerges.

► Pride in achievement

'When we made the puppets, Martin showed me a quicker way of putting tissue paper on my big alien puppet. Then John helped me choose its clothes and that day I felt absolutely fantastically great!' Or: 'Nothing went wrong – it all ran like clockwork, the speeches, the dances, the singing, everything went perfectly.'

Pupils who carry away memories of this kind are experiencing pride in the most positive sense, in individual and collective accomplishment: knowing that something they have done is or was good, and that others recognise it as such. For some, what they have discovered is an unrealised talent – and that includes, as teachers have often noted, *'children whose abilities we have not previously witnessed.'*

What is gained, as one headteacher wrote about the Song Cycles project, is *'a sense of worth and value, belief in their own abilities, and a glimpse of the potential they have as artists and musicians.'* And out of that achievement comes confidence: to be independent – *'we worked as a collective which really gave me more confidence in my individual work'*; to be persistent – *'I learned to be myself, and persist in what I believe in'*; to be enterprising – for one small school, what characterised the experience of the project as a whole was *'the sense of having been adventurous'*.

◀ 5 ▶ SOME QUESTIONS

Across the range of experiences outlined, there are some obvious variables – some art-forms (painting, writing) are essentially solitary, for example, while others (the performance arts), are more likely to involve collaboration. But a list of this kind is one way of defining the *values* which underpin and justify an arts-education project of this kind, and which any evaluation must try to establish. We perhaps don't think enough about values: we work in an educational system in which it sometimes seems that values have been replaced by standards – but statistics are no substitute for a real sense of what it is you are trying to achieve.

The experiences listed above are what, in evaluation jargon, we might call 'measures of success'. The evidence for these experiences is in one sense solid enough: they are reported recurringly across a range of activities. But experience is by nature subjective. This analysis has been based on what the pupils themselves have said, and on what teachers have said on the pupils' behalf.

So are these things *measurable*? Some things are easily counted – like the number of pupils who attend a lesson, or the number who are awarded this many marks in a test. But other things are not. How 'measurable' are the experiences described here – and how important is that?

The Groundswell Project comes to an end in March 2001. As a learning organisation, DAISI is committed to reflecting on these and other findings, and using them to support its future work, and to argue the value of bringing artists into the context of school.

The place of creativity in the educational system is a live issue. 'All Our Futures', the report of the National Advisory Committee for Cultural and Creative Education alluded to earlier¹, finds the present balance to be wanting – and argues that some creative thinking is called for.

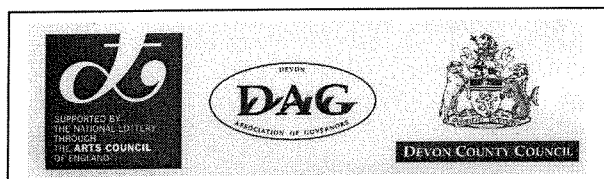
Here are some of the questions which this provisional account of the impact of artists' work through the Groundswell Project would seem to invite:

- ▶ Does the list of gains in Section 4 match your own experience of 'arts-in-schools' work? What else might you add?
- ▶ Do these experiences vary across art-forms? In what way?
- ▶ Are they common across age-groups? Or are some more likely, or more significant, in primary school, or in secondary school?
- ▶ If you are an artist, does this list suggest points of development for your work in schools? What can you offer a school that it cannot offer itself?
- ▶ If you are a teacher, does this suggest points of development for your curriculum work? Are all of these experiences dependent upon the presence of an artist?
- ▶ What is the effectiveness of such work in the longer term? Are these gains transferable to other contexts? Will pupils have opportunities to draw on this experience in the future, and will they be capable of doing so?
- ▶ Do artist-in-school projects and the arts National Curriculum emphasise the same things? Does the way in which the National Curriculum is currently implemented tend to foster these experiences?
- ▶ Which of these experiences are exclusive to, or largely dependent upon, the arts? Are they equally available to pupils through other curriculum areas?
- ▶ And finally: how might such experiences be measured?

If you would like to respond to any of these questions, please contact DAISI at the address below.

Reference: 1. 'All Our Futures', the report of the National Advisory Committee for Cultural and Creative Education, available at www.dfes.gov.uk/nacce.

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