



Creative Partnerships in South Tyneside

South Tyneside Libraries devised a **Creative Reading** project, funded by The Reading Agency, to build information handling and research skills (plus inspiration and fun) into a year-long international Creative Partnerships scheme for primary children planning a garden for a new school building. Garden of the Imagination, which supported Art and design, Citizenship, Design and technology, Drama, Modern foreign languages and Science throughout the primary curriculum, linked schools in South Tyneside and Epinay, near Paris.

"We wanted to show schools how libraries can contribute towards learning and make reading interesting, fun and relevant."

The effects

The Reading Agency funded Creative Reading work by South Tyneside libraries alongside a year-long international Creative Partnerships project to help four South Tyneside schools plan a garden for their new shared building. Book boxes and research visits to the Central Library in South Shields were linked to 'Garden of the Imagination', which supported Art and design, Citizenship, Design and technology, Drama, Modern foreign languages (MFL), Science throughout the primary curriculum. The library sessions focused on information handling and research. All the children, including the key stage 1 classes, were introduced to maps, photographs and original watercolours of the area. Library staff joined classes on day visits to Alnwick Gardens with artists and a storyteller. The children's life-size 3D models of winter gardens were exhibited in the Central Library.

The experience

Kathryn Armstrong, Young People's Services Co-ordinator, South Tyneside Public Library Service

This Creative Reading project, funded by The Reading Agency, was part of Garden of the Imagination, an international Creative Partnerships project linking four South Tyneside schools with three partner schools in Epinay-sur-Seine near Paris. Children worked with artists and storytellers to gather ideas for the development of gardens within their schools and local areas. For the four South Tyneside schools involved — then called Highfield Infants, Downhill Infants and Nursery, Cheviot Juniors and Bamburgh School — the project was particularly momentous. At the end of the project Highfield, Downhill and Cheviot would be merged to form a new school called Seaview Primary in a new building which they would share with Bamburgh, a special school. The children spent the year before the move planning their future shared school garden, working with storyteller Malcolm Green and artists Gilly Rogers, Paula Turner and Helen Law. They visited Alnwick Gardens for inspiration and exchanged pictures, poems and comments with their contemporaries in

Epinay. The library was involved from the outset: we wanted to show schools how we can contribute towards learning and make reading interesting, fun and relevant. South Tyneside library staff generated Creative Reading activities on this theme and joined the creative experience visits to Alnwick.

Book boxes included gardening and science titles as well as "inspirational" picture books and fiction. Each class spent at least two half-days at Central Library where they worked in small groups with the People's Network librarian on pre-researched web-sites, with Local Studies and Museum staff on maps, photographs and original watercolours of the area, and with other staff looking at the wider (including adult) book stock. Downhill Infants also visited the Central Library on World Book Day. Their visit was linked to the project through a Book Worms theme. The classes enjoyed minibug stories, sessions with Durham Wildlife Trust and crafts.

Meanwhile the children were working with artists to produce plans and 3D life-size models of winter gardens. These were re-assembled in the central library as a walk-through exhibit for repeat visits by the classes. This was open to the public for more than a month, with comments invited in a visitors' book. The effect was of a paper garden in the middle of the library. Moving on to a coastal studies theme, they were able to discover how their local coastline had changed and explore coastal and ocean websites (the classes were provided with books and specially prepared worksheets relating to websites to take away). There were also sessions on handling marine animals with Blue Reef aquarium, storytime sessions and opportunities to compose sea-shore poems.

Outcomes

The library service now uses the Creative Reading project as a model for all its school visits, continuing to involve Local Studies and museums staff.

Many of the children's garden designs were incorporated in the landscape architect's plan for their new school. Library staff were struck by the way key stage 1 children became absorbed by materials in the Local Studies department: the first time these materials had been presented to such young children. The maps and photographic material particularly engaged boys.

Responses from the public to the exhibition in the library:

Art teacher from a local secondary school:

"My two-year-old kept saying "Wow, Mummy" and I couldn't agree more. What an inspirational piece of work!"

Visitors:

"It's amazing-so dreamlike. I want to stay in here!"

"Children shame us with their wonderful imagination. The older generations could learn from them"

Librarian:

"I take a little walk through the garden most days, because even when the library is busy, the garden feels calm and peaceful."

Resources and staffing

- Creative Partnerships funded visits to Alnwick Gardens and creative professionals to work alongside the visits and in schools
- TRA Creative Reading project funded travel to Central Library and involvement of outside providers (Durham Wildlife Trust, Sealife Centre)
- Library staff involved were Young People's Services staff, People's Network Librarian
- Local Studies Librarian and assistant
- Community Development Librarian
- The six classes involved had two full day visits to Alnwick and at least two half-day visits to Central Library plus time to work on their gardens in class
- Each class visit to the library involved six members of library staff.

Partners

- Creative Partnerships
- The Reading Agency
- South Tyneside Council (Libraries)
- South Shields Museum
- Durham Wildlife Trust
- Highfield Infant School, Downhill Infants and Nursery, Cheviot Juniors (now all merged as Seaview School) and Bamburgh School

Challenges/ lessons learned

The biggest challenge is to use this model of working with all schools. For that the schools need to see the value of making a considerable time commitment (though Creative Partnerships schools have reported that when working in this way with Year 6 classes, the SATS results improved). Without external funding, it is a challenge to persuade schools to spend money on transporting children to libraries which are not within walking distance. Working with partners (for example South Shields Museum, Wildlife Trust) can harness resources and expertise that is relevant to the learning needs of the children but which the library service cannot provide.

The future

South Tyneside is using the model developed in Creative Reading for other class visits. The authority is applying to the European Cultural Foundation for funding for a transnational Creative Reading project. This will involve working with authors and illustrators in England and France and sharing experience and creativity in writing through the Northern Children's Book Festival, through both an exchange of writers and the festival's interactive website.