

In the twelfth of a series of articles looking at the work of Creative Partnerships, **Wendy Andrews** considers the healthy eating agenda and looks at how some participating schools are learning more about the creativity involved in growing and cooking fresh fruit and vegetables.

Cultivating a creative approach



With the current, Jamie Oliver-championed focus on encouraging children to eat a healthier diet, it is timely to look at some pioneering projects that are helping children understand where their food comes from by enabling them to grow their own in their school grounds. Several Creative Partnerships projects across the country are focusing on children growing fruit, vegetables, crops and other plants. Whilst the projects link directly to various subjects, including history, science and design, they have the potential to touch on all areas of the curriculum.

Edible playgrounds

Edible Playgrounds and Gardens for Life are twin schemes that bring schools' outdoor spaces together with sustainability, education and creative learning. Edible Playgrounds is a Creative Partnerships Cornwall initiative and is transforming playgrounds in schools across the county. Around 30 schools are making

their playgrounds more enjoyable places for children to play, and of these, 12 are involved in growing their own food. Students, teachers and members of the local community are working alongside professional designers, artists, gardeners and play consultants.

As well as better-designed play spaces, the projects encourage children to think about where food comes from, and to take an interest in eating healthy fruits and vegetables that they have grown themselves. The transformed playgrounds include play-dens and shelters, multi-sensory plants, areas to encourage mini-beasts and vegetable plots, herbs and spices.

Edible Playgrounds' partners include Mor Design, The Sensory Trust, Gardens for Life, Beechnut Learning Projects, Terrain Design, Touchwood Enterprises, Wild Cherry Designs and a variety of local creative practitioners and horticulturalists. It also has links with Learning through Landscapes, Children's Fund, Sports Coordinators, Duchy Nursery, Cornwall

Outdoors and the National Trust.

Gardens for life

Gardens for Life is an international initiative which is run by the Eden Project in the UK and involves projects in India and Kenya. It links school children across the world through their understanding of food and their awareness of issues surrounding global and local farming. It stems from the belief that growing food crops in school gardens is the starting point for educating children about issues confronting the world today, including dependence on each other and using natural resources in a sustainable way.

Many children have little idea of the origin of what they eat and therefore little idea of the connection between rural and urban areas – or producing countries and their own. The lack of understanding about the connection between food, lifestyle and nutrition is expressed in the health of our young people. On the other hand, most children in rural

Africa know where food comes from, but many regard agriculture as a low status occupation that does not have much to do with 'real' knowledge which will get them white-collar jobs in the city. Gardens for Life aims to increase children's knowledge and awareness of food and their understanding of the experiences of children in other parts of the world. This month, representatives from Gardens for Life in Kenya and India have been visiting partner projects in the UK to exchange information and knowledge.

Gardens for Life is managed by Eden Project in partnership with the British Council, DfES, DfID, Creative Partnerships, Global Dimension Trust, CISCI Foundation, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Royal Horticultural Society, Science across the World and Syngenta Foundation.

Dax Ansell is co-ordinator of the Edible Playgrounds scheme and Gardens For Life in Cornwall. He has been working with schools across Cornwall for the past two years, and is thrilled that they are seeing the results of their hard work pay off. "These things always take time to develop, from the ideas through to the construction and planting, and finally the maturing of the whole thing until it is how the children and the teachers have really imagined it," he says.



The Gardens for Life project in India

What is Creative Partnerships?

Creative Partnerships is a government-funded programme delivered through Arts Council England, that aims to give schoolchildren in deprived areas throughout England the opportunity to develop creativity in learning, and participate in cultural activities.

Its vision is based on developing long-term partnerships between schools and cultural and creative organisations. These include architects, theatre and dance companies, historic buildings, musicians and online designers.

Sixteen Phase One partnerships were established in July 2002 as an initial pilot for the programme. The

programme was then extended to cover 36 areas, which are currently being rolled out. The programme is funded through the DCMS (with some additional funds from the DfES) and delivered by Arts Council England. Funding for the programme is currently confirmed until 2008.

www.creative-partnerships.com

COMING UP..

In the final 2005 supplement, we look at how Creative Partnerships is influencing regeneration projects around the country, bringing a new dimension to the transformation of communities by placing creativity at the centre of children's lives.

Art and gardens

Managed by the National Trust, Gibside in Newcastle-upon-Tyne is one of the North of England's finest landscapes, a forest garden currently under restoration. The former home of the late Queen Mother's family, the estate embraces miles of walks through woodland and beside the River Derwent. As part of an initiative to form links with a school at each of their sites to enable children to visit historic gardens and places in the North East, the National Trust offered Grindon Broadway Junior School in Sunderland an allotment space within a walled garden at Gibside, with the support of Creative Partnerships and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The allotment allowed Year 3 pupils (aged 7) the opportunity to learn about managing an allotment and how to grow and cultivate crops, with a view to using them in the classroom in cookery lessons. It has provided the children with an invaluable insight into the world outside their usual experiences, providing them with skills that could be transferred back to their school garden.

Grindon Broadway Junior School's allotment is an ongoing programme and the school will be sharing with parents their knowledge of growing crops and will be teaching pupils how the crops can be used in a variety of meals. The allotment project was developed as part of a larger programme that saw the development of a sculpture garden, which was inspired by a selection of designs by the pupils. Two artists, Cath Campbell and Bernadette O'Toole helped the pupils to draw inspiration from artwork they had seen at Baltic, the international centre for contemporary art, to create works for the garden.



Photo: Corinne Lewis

The sculpture garden at Grindon Broadway Junior School

Growing connections

The Global Food Project is a partnership between Brockhill Park Performing Arts College, which is a Creative Partnerships Kent School near Folkestone, and the Food Project in Boston, USA. As part of their Citizenship programme, a group of 13-year-olds are using video conferencing to talk regularly to American teenagers about growing their own healthy food.

The USA version of the Food Project is an exciting and innovative scheme that has developed over a period of 13 years in Boston to enable young people to grow organic crops for the benefit of their community. Brockhill Park staff visited a farm in suburban Massachusetts and a Boston neighbourhood known more for its problems than its potatoes. The Food Project there is growing organic produce for people who normally have little access to such foods – and gives the young people an agrarian experience in the process. Half of the two million pounds weight of carrots, sweet corn, raspberries and other crops are donated to soup kitchens and shelters. The rest is sold at Farmers'

Markets in low income areas and to families in suburban Boston who buy a seasonal share in the farm for a weekly supply of produce. The scheme provides a rich springboard for learning – science, citizenship, communication, enterprise and nutrition.

Brockhill Park is using the Boston enterprise as a model and has started its own Global Food Project. All the Year 8 students are working on the project in their Citizenship lessons which include Science and Enterprise. Anthony Lyng, Headteacher at Brockhill Park comments, "What could be better? Brockhill Park is in a prime position to offer such opportunities, having a neighbouring farm and surrounding land. This is a unique way to teach young people the value of healthy eating and lifestyle, as well as making them aware of those people in the community less fortunate than themselves." Brockhill Park hopes to mirror the Boston Food Project with their own Farmers' Market selling the produce grown and harvested by the students, and each of the nine groups of students is planning how they will use the profits made.

Coming alive

Coming Alive at Kate's Hill Community Primary School in Dudley, West Midlands is an exciting Creative Partnerships Black Country project in which Year 2 children (aged 6 years) are creating a garden area for the whole school to enjoy. They are growing vegetables for the school kitchen, which links into the school healthy eating agenda. Coming Alive also links to geography, science and literacy. Pupils work alongside staff to prepare the ground and propagate seeds in a greenhouse ready for planting. They also ran their own plant sale at the school fête in the summer term.

Alongside this business focus of the project, the children have worked with a creative professional to develop every aspect of the outside area. Artist Hannah Dyer has helped them create nine circular murals which are sited on brick exterior walls in the

garden area. After a visit to Sudeley Castle to look at knot gardens and formal planting, every child produced a ceramic plaque based on drawings they made at Sudeley and these were placed alongside the murals in the garden. The children are also making bio-degradable benches and bird and bat boxes to encourage wildlife into the new garden.

The school won first prize in the Dudley Junior Pride Competition, which was open to primary schools interested in improving their local environment. Judges were impressed by the way a "wasted space at the back of the school had been transformed into an oasis of colour and vitality". They were particularly pleased with the standard of artwork on the walls and the fact that it was a sustainable project and had changed the way children thought about the science curriculum.



Photo: Sue Webb

Dig for Victory is a Creative Partnerships project based in Slough, Berkshire. It involves children in Year 5 (aged 9 years) at two primary schools, Godolphin Junior School and Priory School (pictured), where it links into a history project about the Second World War. The children dug vegetable plots, planted seeds, watered, fed and harvested them and finally used their crops to make food. The range of vegetables, fruits and herbs they produced included carrots, chillies, green beans, sage, marrows, parsley, peppers, potatoes, radishes, rosemary, strawberries, tomatoes. After their first highly productive year, the children produced another bumper harvest this year.