

## Creative Partnerships – Artists in Schools’: Reflections on the outcomes of a collaborative programme between art teachers, pupils and artists in Cyprus

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### **Keywords**

Creative partnerships, teachers, artists, collaboration, art lesson, learning, action research

### **Abstract**

This visual essay presents the designing and implementation of a collaborative project among teachers and artists, entitled ‘Creative Partnerships – Artists in Schools’ (CP-AiS). The project was initiated and organized by the Cyprus Society for Education through Arts and was instigated in Cypriot state schools during the academic year 2014-2015. It involved local and contemporary artists, art educators and children and was organized in diverse school environments. Thus, eight teachers – artists’ collaborations were permeated through the formation of meaningful partnerships within school settings. The partners implemented multisensory artistic projects, aiming to enrich children’s self-confidence, interpersonal relationships and learning opportunities created during the art class. There was a variety of media and methods used in the overall program, from recycled and natural materials to digital art. Overall, the pilot implementation of the CP-AiS program was successful, since all partners were satisfied by all stages of the process, including CySEA’s support, inasmuch as they expressed their wish for continuation of such initiatives.



**'Creative Partnerships – Artists in Schools' (CP-AiS) is a collaborative project initiated and organized by the Cyprus Society for Education through Arts. It expected to develop and promote teachers and artists' collaborations through the formation of meaningful partnerships within school settings.**

Similar collaborative projects that were implemented abroad have been characterized as significant means that nurture critical thinking, creativity, communication, as well as children's aesthetic appreciation and self-esteem (Creative Partnerships, 2007). At the same time, not just the children, but also all partners benefit from these collaborations (Orfali, 2004; Sharp, et al., 2006).

So far, in Cyprus, such collaborations were mainly based on the initiatives of enthusiastic art teachers, who invited an artist to their school, mainly for a day, to work along with the children, share their experiences and techniques with them and produce art works together. The "CP-AiS" Program was the first organized program of this kind, aiming to be added to the official programs ran and supported by the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture.



Program Logo and The Program Training Guide

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## THE PROGRAM

The aim of the CP-AiS Program was the development of meaningful partnerships amongst participants as well as the development of children's creative thinking, engagement and motivation through a variety of art practices.

The program ran as a pilot in Cypriot state schools during the academic year 2014-2015. It was completed in three phases:

- Phase 1: Seminars for teachers and artists
- Informing them about the Program and its aims
  - Bringing them in contact with each other
  - Inviting them to join the Program and proceed to collaborations

Phase 2: Partners' planning of projects

- Deciding on the topic
- Planning activities
- Deciding on each partner's role
- Feedback from other participants

Phase 3: Implementation of projects in schools

- Artists' visits to schools
- Class trips
- Creation of individual and team works
- Dissemination and presentation of projects

The partnerships:

- 8 projects
- 7 elementary schools and 1 kindergarten
- 181 children
- 8 art teachers
- 7 artists

## PROJECT: 'THE CITY AND THE SEA'

In this project took part 44 children from Grades 5 and 6 of a small school, not far from the city port. The artist who collaborated with them specializes in creating miniatures with the use of recycled wood. The aim of their project was to create a map of the area where their school is located.



1. Visiting the artist's workshop



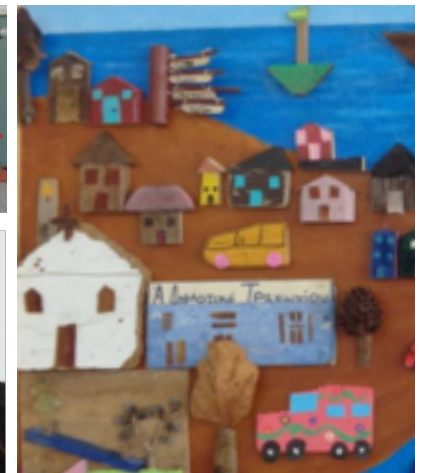
3. Creating individual works with wood



2. Visit to a neighboring shipyard and collection of wood pieces

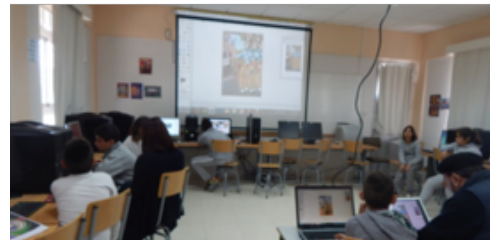


4. Working on the group work



5. The finished work, decorating one of the school's walls

**PROJECT: 'MESSAGES FROM E.O.K.A.'S STRUGGLE'**  
Nine 6th graders from a small sub-urban school collaborated with their teacher and a digital artist to create a group work inspired by the Cypriots' uprising against the British colonialism, which led to the independence of the island and the declaration of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960.



3. Working on the group work



4. The finished work



1. Meeting with the artist and his work



2. The children are introduced to the software by processing self-portraits they had created in a previous lesson



5. The work exhibited in the Municipal Gallery, among works of established artists also inspired by the struggle of E.O.K.A.

## PROJECT: 'THINKING OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD... DIFFERENTLY'

In this project twenty 5th graders collaborated with a mosaic artist. The aim of the project was to help children think about the industrialized and barren from visual stimuli neighborhood through a different lens and be able to use and transform industrial wastes to resources in order to create unique mosaic art; hence improving the aesthetics of their school's environment.



3. Experimenting with materials and deciding on the group works



1. Preparing the ground: getting to know about the art of mosaics and creating small works with hand-made tesserae



4. Collaborative work



5. The completed works



2. Collecting and classifying material from their neighborhood for the group works



6. The finished works on the school's entrance wall

## PROJECT: 'EXPLORING OUR TRADITION THROUGH CLAY'

In this project 18 children worked with a well-known Cypriot ceramist. The project aimed to improve their artistic aptitudes and expand the possibilities of working with clay as a traditional medium. The children created clay pots and plates, presenting traditional musical instruments. The children's final work was presented at a school exhibition at the end of the year.



1. Meeting with the artist



2. The first clay works



3. Working on the clay plates



4. Visiting the artist's workshop



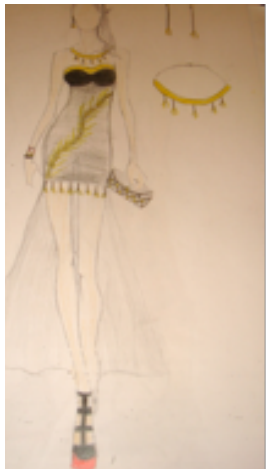
5. The final artwork

## PROJECT: 'IT'S A FASHION TREND; IT 'LL PASS!'

In this interdisciplinary and inter-generation project, a fashion designer shared her expertise with 17 pupils of 6th grade at a rural school. The pupils collaborated with their grandparents to create jewelry and clothing, made from recycled materials. Moreover, they explored the history of fashion trends and discussed about body aesthetics and values across the years. The main aim of the project was to strengthen their self-confidence. The pupils' creations were presented during a successful fashion show.



1. The artist working with the children and grandmothers



2. Exploring the fashion trends on different body types



3. Tailoring a wedding dress and a tuxedo by using plastic bags



4. The school's fashion show



5. Earrings and bags created during the project were sold to raise money for a voluntary organization

## PROJECT: 'FLORA AND FAUNA OF CYPRUS'

Sixteen children of a rural kindergarten collaborated with a ceramic artist. The aim of this second clay project was to learn about the Cypriot flora and fauna and create an art piece for their school inspired by this theme. The project also included excursions to nature, to the artist's workshop as well as school planting activities that involved children, parents and other members of the community.



3. Exploring the medium



1. Identifying the need for beautification of the school's entrance



2. Visiting the school and working with the children



4. Nature inspiration



5. Visiting the artist's workshop



## PROJECT: 'THE SEA WASHES UP STORIES'

This was the second collaboration in the context of the CP-AiS Program of an artist working with waste pieces of wood. In this project, she joined 28 3rd Grade children and their teacher. Their aim was to transform old pieces of wood washed up by the sea into meaningful objects and figures that they incorporated in a theatrical play.



1. Visiting the artist's workshop and getting to know her work



2. Experimentation with the materials



3. Transforming the old wood pieces



4. Collaborative work



5. Completing the works

## PROJECT: 'WORKING WITH AN ARTIST'

This was a project where two fine artists-painters visited a very small rural school and worked with all the pupils for three days. During their visits, the pupils created individual drawings, collaborative collages, three-dimensional work with recycled materials and alteration of old clothing. This was a lifetime experience for the children, who proudly exhibited their work to the whole school.



1. Exploring the work of the artists



4. Working with recycled material



5. Transforming old clothes



2. Drawing session



3. Collaborative collages



6. Finished work



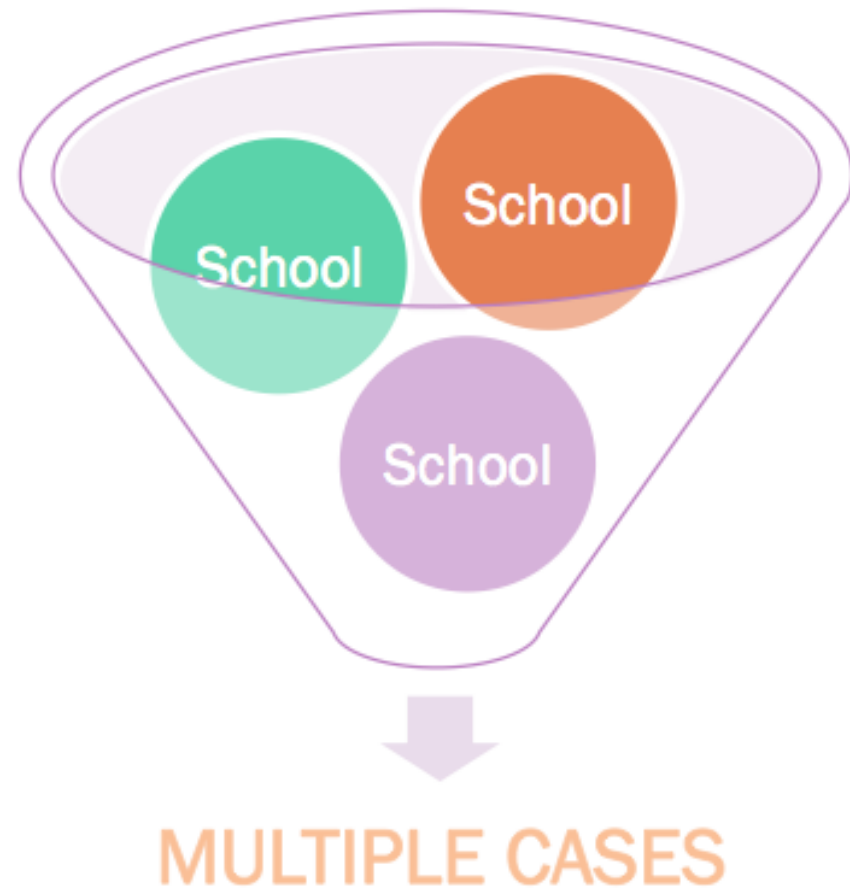
## EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

**Along with the implementation of the CP-AiS Program, data was collected for the assessment and evaluation of the Program's outcomes and its impact on the children, educators and artists.**

The evaluation took place in two levels. In the first level, every participating teacher conducted an Educational Action Research study, gathering data through interviews and questionnaires with children, and using them as tools for reflection and melioration of their practices. They also assessed each lesson in after class meetings and discussions with the artists. They reflected on the outcomes and scheduled or re-scheduled together the next lessons.



For the assessment the overall outcomes of the Program, the CySEA research committee approached each school as a unique case. Using the data collected by the teachers, the overall Program assessment was based on a Multiple-Case Study.



## THE OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM

I liked that she started with things that we thought that only artists do, and then we made our own creations.  
child

We worked together and we created something beautiful!  
child

It was a fulfilling experience, despite the work load. I enjoyed it and I felt satisfaction for the fact that the children welcomed my methods. I was also very touched by what they made and the way they responded to our collaboration.  
artist

They kept asking: 'When is the artist coming again, teacher?'  
teacher

The parents came and worked with their children, and the children were showing them how to do it as equal partners.  
teacher

Every day we did something different, strange, unheard.  
child

My most difficult pupil, who never works and is always bored during art classes, not only worked with excitement but also created some really beautiful works and received his classmates' congratulations!  
teacher

Some of the [clay] works broke during transfer, but the children were not discouraged and they asked one another if they need help to remake it, and they helped each other and so they finished in a very short time.  
artist

## ENCOURAGING FEEDBACK

Excitement

Engagement

Collaboration

Problem solving

Hands-on experience

Experimentation with new materials/techniques

## CHALLENGES

Material/equipment availability

School engagement

Economic factors

Participation

Time issues

Distance

We wanted the artist to come more times. We didn't do many things.

child

Some of the children who didn't participate in the program complained, and we promised them that we will invite the artist again next year.

teacher

We needed time between the meetings to reflect and re-organize the lesson. Sometimes the time was not enough.

teacher

The school didn't have the money to buy the software, so I found and installed a cheaper one on their computers. But then I had to learn the new programme myself. One pupil sat next to me and he helped me. They even didn't have enough computers, so I brought one laptop from home.

artist

We didn't get the chance to visit the artist's workshop because our school is so far and the cost for a coach was very high.

teacher

It was very hard because the other colleagues were suspicious and didn't help. They even didn't come to greet the artist.

teacher

## PUPILS

In all schools, teachers referred to the positive impact of pupils' behavior and attitude towards the lesson and the school community. Enthusiasm, self-confidence, team-working, personal responsibility and satisfaction were only some of the benefits accentuated in teachers and pupils' interview data. Moreover, pupils appreciated the opportunities given to contribute to the wider community, demonstrating, thus, high levels of social responsibility.

## TEACHERS

Teachers became confident on their own creative potential and professional skills. Each project consisted of a new learning opportunity for them; implementing new techniques, overcoming challenges presented by new mediums, reflecting on their teaching practice, showing resilience and reflexivity were only a few of the new skills and methodologies they acquired by working with another expert individual in the school environment.

## ARTISTS

For the artists, this was a refreshing chance to share their knowledge and expertise with an interested audience and to create a collaborative artwork. All participants offered their knowledge, experience and working space with generosity and humbleness, enabling genuine relationships to flourish.

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the pilot implementation of the CP-AiS Program was permeated with success since all partners were satisfied from their participation at all stages. According to the initial analysis of the results, teachers, pupils and artists enjoyed the learning opportunities offered and wished for the continuation of such initiatives.

## PROCESSES

Overall, the CySEA organisation team received positive feedback regarding the way the whole process of the CP-AiS Program was delivered. Apart from the development of the initial guide, there was a genuine effort to provide support (financial, consultation, organisational) whenever requested. Further in-depth analysis of the data collecting tools will enable their reformation and improvement for future references. Hopefully, the dissemination of the aforementioned results will enable the continuation of successful creative partnerships to take place in many Cypriot schools; hence, diffusing the benefits of quality art lessons to as many children as possible.

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