

# A universal language



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Supplementary schools are community-based initiatives to provide additional educational support for children who also attend mainstream schools. They are often geared to provide specific heritage languages, cultural and religious teaching for children from ethnic minorities and additional literacy, numeracy, science and homework support. Traditionally, teaching in these settings has been formal and desk-based, offering little opportunity for interactive or creative engagement. The Creative Teaching and Learning (CTL) project within Supplementary Education aims to support supplementary school teachers to adopt more creative approaches to teaching, whether in languages or other subjects. Funded by John Lyon's Charity and designed by Mon Partovi, the project launched just before the pandemic under the remit of the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education (NRCSE). It has continued under the Young People's Foundation Trust | Centre for Supplementary Education following a merger in 2022, with Patrice Baldwin joining as a creative partner and lead trainer.

The training sessions, led by Baldwin, focus on using drama as an engaging teaching and learning tool, helping students think creatively and critically, and interact meaningfully during lessons. Baldwin has delivered training sessions to teachers from various cultural backgrounds, including Persian, Lebanese, Sudanese, Brazilian and Chinese communities.

Each of the school-based training days clearly need to be of cultural relevance to those who attend, so a story of significance to particular cultures are selected for individual school's training days, for example *The Merchant and the Parrot* (Persian), *The Magic Paintbrush* (Chinese), *How Night Came from the Sea* (Brazilian). During the training, the teachers participate in the drama – often a

new experience. The drama strategies are presented as 'thought and talk frames'. The teachers are asked to be more exploratory, to try out at least one or two drama strategies with their own classes, to enable pupils to talk and interact more, to share ideas and think creatively.

Ongoing advice and support sessions are available for lead teachers, and lesson observation and feedback is available to some (budget restricted). Project feedback has been very positive. Joy Collins, Securing Success CEO reported that, 'Patrice led the participants through different approaches to listening, speaking, group work, drama, storytelling, without putting anyone under pressure, mindful that perhaps some people were a little shy, a little reticent, so she reassured, and she modelled ways that she would talk to the children'.

Other comments included this from a teacher at a Chinese school: 'Previously, it used to be me doing most of the talking as the teacher and the students were just listening, but after I attended the training, I understand that the more the children are involved, the better they will learn,' and this summary from a teacher at a Persian school: 'The training overall, it was very good, and they give me lots of clues about how I can manage my class and how to engage my learners. They are more focused in the lesson, and it is so positive.'

Teachers also mentioned that the use of drama strategies had a positive effect on students, who have shown greater enthusiasm for interactive learning approaches. Teachers have observed that drama-based lessons have improved students' language proficiency and given them new opportunities to express themselves. The headteacher of a Persian supplementary school commented that the changes were especially effective for children with learning disabilities, helping them become more engaged as active participants in the classroom. Feedback from headteachers has demonstrated a noticeable cultural

It's widely accepted that drama techniques can be usefully applied to other subjects, and now a ground-breaking initiative is bringing that expertise to community-based supplementary schools, helping to provide further learning opportunities for both students and teachers.

**Patrice Baldwin and Monireh Partovi share their experiences**



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shift in participating schools. For example, teachers from a Brazilian supplementary school remarked that the training had fostered a 'dynamic and interactive learning environment.' Meanwhile, teachers from a Persian supplementary school noted that creative teaching was gradually becoming the norm in their classrooms.

The CTL initiative has transformed classroom practices through the use of drama, making learning more engaging and interactive. Drama allows students to step into various roles, think critically, and express themselves in ways traditional methods often don't, while also empowering teachers to embrace more creative and student-centred approaches. This method fosters creativity, collaboration, and deeper understanding, helping students develop essential life skills and explore their cultural identities.

The project has now been integrated into the YPF Trust Quality Mark framework for Supplementary Education, which promotes creativity, empowers student voices, and helps develop school leadership and improvement. The framework aims to create safe spaces for children and young people, where they can develop their creativity, express their views, and grow into active, responsible citizens. This transformative approach unlocks new opportunities for growth and success, enriching the educational experience for all involved and creating a more dynamic learning environment. **D&T**