

EGG: SCHOOL WITHOUT WALLS

Date	2011 and 2012
Region	South West
Artform(s)	Drama
Number of participants	50 pupils across two years
Annabel Jackson Associates Ltd role	We evaluated School Without Walls
Methodology	Stakeholders surveys, pupil surveys, parent surveys, and a learning seminar with egg staff, teachers and artists

Background

School Without Walls was a radical educational experiment aimed at interrogating and potentially reshaping teaching, by transposing school to an arts environment. For seven weeks, two year groups from St Andrews Primary School in Bath, Years 4 and 5, went to the egg as their place of learning. This project happened twice, in 2011 and 2012, with some fine-tuning between the two occasions. The artists' role was facilitated by 5x5x5.



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Description

The distinctive features of School Without Walls were:

- **Learning was multi-sensory.** For example, in one of the taster days pupils explored the theatre, labelling spaces as the noisiest/quietest/most scary/most fun and then sharing opinions.
- **The project engendered a sense of identity.** Pupils sketched out designs for a School Without Walls logo, which they used to create a t-shirt uniform.

- **Reflection was central to the project.** Pupils were given a journal in which to record their thoughts, feelings and observations. A facilitator conducted initial interviews with the children about their feelings towards school. Each week for the duration of the residency the adult team held reflective meetings to discuss the young people's interests and how these could be explored.
- **Learning was linked to the curriculum.** Pupils' daily routine included Maths exercises and individual reading with Theatre Royal staff. A teacher from a local secondary school took a small group out to do maths work based upon the architecture and lighting rig of the theatre. The use of coordinates and maps featured frequently in the work. Pupils learnt to read maps, pace distances and use a compass; on one occasion they used these skills to find a secret location where two egg practitioners were masquerading as spies.
- **Pupils were introduced to the theatre.** Pupils saw several plays whilst at the egg, all of which had follow up or preparation activities to support their experience. The group interviewed the cast of some of the plays and created artwork based on their themes.
- **Learning was intended to give a sense of place.** One group went out on a heritage trail around the city to find out information about Bath's historic sites. They spent a day orienteering their way through the City to a local park, observing the geography of Bath, and trying out methods to measure trees.
- **The environment was relatively un-hierarchical.** The adults consulted the children about a School Without Walls, and explored the notion of how adults and children can learn from each other.
- **There was a strong end to the project.** To celebrate the end of the project the pupils designed an 'explorers' session at the egg, where activities set up in and around the building (and outdoors) could be discovered by way of a map. This shared the children's creative learning with parents and friends.

Impact

Teaching in School Without Walls was distinctive:

- **The adult-pupil ratio was higher than in a school,** allowing pupils to be taught in small groups and also to interact with a larger number of people. This gave pupils more individual attention but also allowed children to observe adults teaching collaboratively. Teachers, in their turn, had more time to observe individual pupils and groups.
- **Pupils had an insight into the world of work,** either from the egg staff they interviewed or worked with, their experiences of the building, or the practical exercises.
- **The environment was quite different to a classroom:** the walls were plain and the space uncluttered, which pupils seemed to prefer.
- **The egg had a more open, informal style** than a school. There was more freedom in curriculum to follow children's interests. Children had a much bigger input into the planning of day-to-day activities.
- **The children were encouraged to discover and pursue their personal interests.**

- **The lessons were often practical and hands on.** Pupils spent relatively little time sitting still.

Learning

Pupil learning in the egg placement differed from that in school. Children seemed to be more focused. Learning seemed easier. Children took more responsibility for their learning. Children were more aware of their setting and of each other. The egg placement enabled different children to shine. Stakeholders said that overall School Without Walls allowed a more profound engagement with children than is possible in the traditional classroom.

Impact on children

All stakeholders who expressed a view thought that School Without Walls increased children's confidence, and motivation. Pupils learnt to appreciate the theatre. Long after the first project, pupils appeared to have gained in terms of team working skills and maturity. The Head Teacher observed that academically, all children who attended the egg in the first year of the project continued to make at least the expected progress for their age. Their average end of year attainment in core subjects (Maths, English, Science) was in line with national expectations. However, in other areas of the curriculum, pupils were observed to be working well above their average age related expectations.

Challenges

The project was not without its challenges. The logistics were complicated, especially as plans changed quickly. The team learnt about the benefits but also the boundaries of child-led learning; for example, children might still need intervention from an adult to tell them to take a break, even if they are heavily engrossed in projects. Some teachers were uncomfortable that some of the adults were not qualified teachers. Others were concerned about what they called 'The Cinderella effect' upon the other children at school. There was also somewhat of a come down effect on the children once they were back in school. Some parents started with reservations about the project, especially its impact on their child's learning, but all except one were won over.

Evaluator's comment

Overall School Without Walls offered an opportunity to consider how learning can be transformed by using creative values, spaces, people, ideas and exercises. Some aspects of the project could be replicated in other contexts, for example the high pupil-teacher ratios. More fundamental than these aspects of delivery, however, was the questions that School Without Walls raised about the nature of learning.