

Putting Carnival at the centre of the curriculum

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During the school year 1993-4, seven Lambeth Primary and special schools took part in a project on Carnival. The project was jointly funded by the London Arts Board, Lambeth Education Department and the schools themselves. There are a number of reasons why we believed that putting Carnival at the centre of the curriculum would benefit children.

Too often multicultural education has been seen as an optional extra, or consisted of a tokenistic celebration of a festival or two, and has not been rigorously and systematically included in the academic curriculum at every level, which is in fact where it belongs. Multicultural education is now in more danger of being marginalised in schools as it is becoming clear that OFSTED inspectors rarely have equal opportunities on their agenda of quality criteria. This has serious implications for all children who need to learn about and appreciate cultural diversity and develop cross-cultural understanding.

The creative arts, performance and practical and physical activities need to be at the centre of any quality curriculum for young children. Sadly, the introduction of the National Curriculum has led to an over-concentration on 'the basics' represented by narrow teaching of the three Rs. This situation will not lead to enhanced learning opportunities nor to raised achievement for children, especially not for young children and many children with special needs, for whom formal approaches simply do not work.

Furthermore recent attacks on topic — and cross-curricular — approaches to teaching have undermined multicultural education as it was often through such topic work that multicultural content was included.

Carnival is a festival of immense cultural, historical and spiritual significance in the Caribbean, with historical roots in both Europe and Africa, and has played a key role in the history of African-Caribbean peoples in their resistance to slavery, colonialism and racism in the Caribbean countries, particularly Trinidad and Tobago, and also in Britain. In Europe Carnival was and in many countries still is a strong and living part of people's culture, linked to the medieval festivals in which, for a limited period, Lords of misrule and the antics of fools mocked at the tyranny of church and state. Carnival was gradually repressed in this country by the combined influence of the Puritan ethic and the process of industrialisation. Notting Hill carnival, developed by Caribbean peoples in this country, is now the biggest

street festival in Europe, attracting visitors from all over the world. The serious study of Carnival is long overdue.

The inspiration for the Carnival in the curriculum project in Lambeth primary schools came in part from a visit to Trinidad primary schools. The energy and commitment of carnivalists and the sheer brilliance of artistic imagination and technological inventiveness displayed in the Trinidad Carnival stay with everyone who has seen it. It is an experience to be spread and shared. So when the London Arts Board wrote to LEAs inviting them to submit a bid for funding for arts related projects in schools it was an opportunity not to be missed.

Aims of the Carnival Arts Project

When Lambeth Education Department submitted a bid for grant aid to launch a Carnival arts project in primary schools we stated our aims:

- to enrich the curriculum on offer to children and to develop activities in schools across a range of art forms which takes account of the National Curriculum programmes of study, particularly in art, music, drama and dance
- to make links between the arts, the core curriculum and the technology curriculum, and to develop a multicultural dimension within them through the introduction of topic-based and cross-curricular activities
- to develop the activities in schools in collaboration with artists from the black community to ensure that the arts make a positive contribution to the learning of all young people in Lambeth and to the achievement and self-esteem of African-Caribbean children
- to produce materials for dissemination in the form of a Carnival in the Curriculum pack and exhibition that will be of benefit to schools and community organisations and carnival artists, and will broaden schools' perspectives on the celebration of festivals
- to offer a programme of arts workshops to schools that promotes direct contact between artists and young people.

The development of the project

The project developed in three stages.

1. Schools planned own curriculum and arts input to link with topics and the National Curriculum. Schools identified resources, both money and skills, from within school and from the parent and community group.

2. Workshops and inservice training sessions for school staff to familiarise them with the history and traditions of carnival and the associated art forms and also hands-on practical experience of carnival dance, music and costume making. The response of school staff to these workshops, particularly the hands-on practical sessions, was so enthusiastic that several schools bought extra workshop sessions for their staff out of their own budgets. Teachers who participated in these workshops became more expert and enthusiastic about carnival arts and were in a much better position to work collaboratively alongside artists when the workshop sessions were run for the children, so making the work more effective.

3. The most critical stage of the project was development in classrooms and the workshops run in schools by artists. This has been the most exciting part of the project. In *all* cases schools have reported great satisfaction with the work of the artists, with their professional skills, their infectious enthusiasm for their art form and their ability to work effectively with young children (age range 3-11).

The impact on the curriculum

The process and form of the curriculum development work varied considerably between schools, depending on the ages and abilities of the children involved, the skills and interests of school staffs, the focus of the curriculum topics and the degree of whole school involvement. Particularly good examples were the development of a whole school topic focus which formed the theme both for the costume masks and for cross-curriculum development in science, mathematics, technology, English and art, music and dance.

Much of what the children learnt through studying Carnival can be shown to relate to the subjects of the National Curriculum:

English

African and Caribbean stories
traditional Anansi stories
the oral tradition explored
storytelling skills developed
writers, poets and calypsonians studied
Caribbean languages
children writing calypsos, stories and poems
exploring rhythm in language

Mathematics

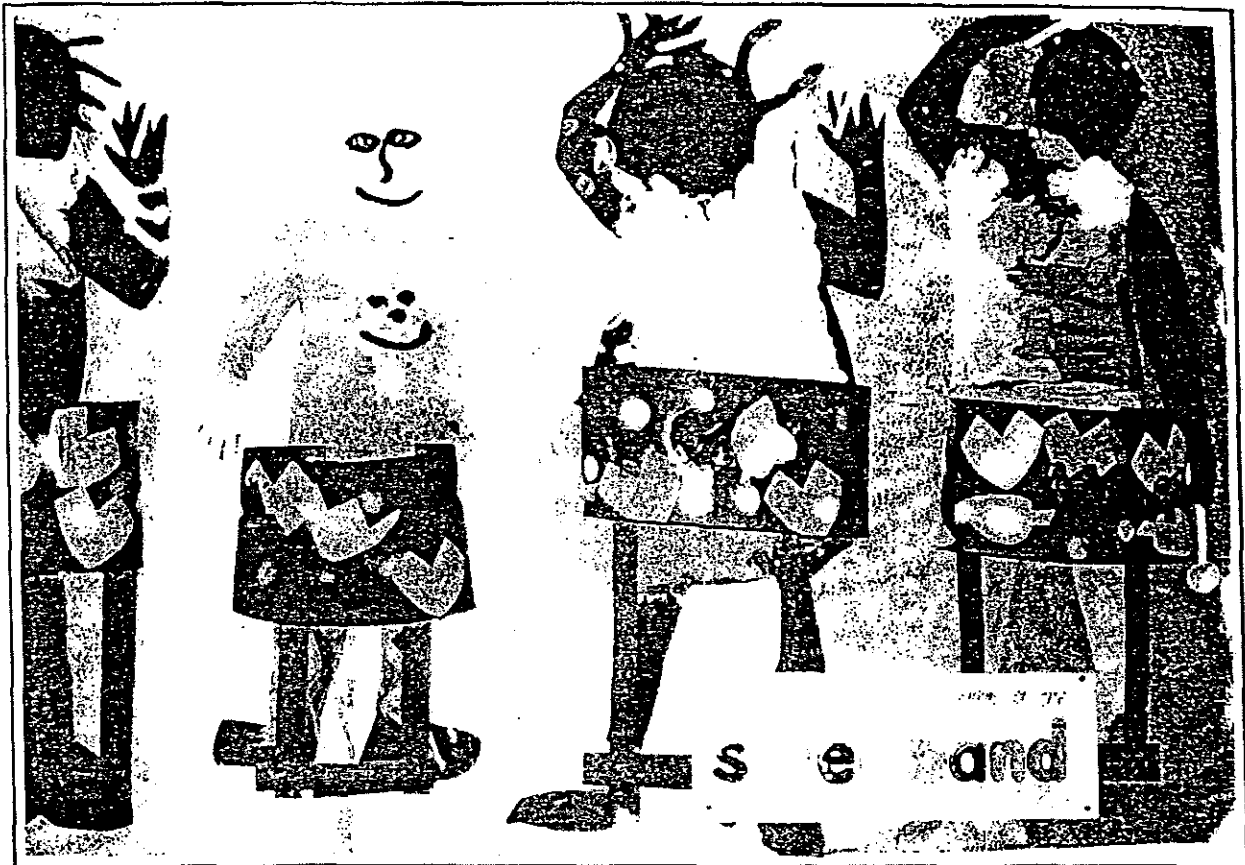
estimating amounts
measuring fabrics and materials
counting and recording findings
studying pattern and symmetry
studying shapes for designs



Greta Mendez giving dance workshop at Rosendale Junior School

Science

colours of the spectrum
materials and their properties
changes to materials for example through using dyes and wax resist techniques
forces involved in pushing and pulling
themes relating to study of the natural world explored and linked to costume design, for example animals, camouflage in nature, the universe, under the sea, the environment, birds and flight
flowers and garden insects



Infant pictures of Steel Band players after workshop on Steel Band at Stockwell Infants.

Technology

making plans
 designing and constructing
 costumes, masks and headpieces
 making musical instruments
 investigating and testing suitable
 materials such as wire and willow,
 paper and plastic, glues, paints
 using tools-saws, drills, pliers
 constructing large scale artifacts

Food technology

Food and festivals
 recipes and food from the Caribbean
 shopping in Brixton market
 preparing and cooking food
 portable food and drinks

Information technology

Collecting data
 using the word processor
 Allwrite programme used to tell stories
 Paintspa programme used for patterns

History

The history of the Caribbean peoples
 invasion and settlement
 the movement of peoples
 slavery and indentured labour
 the triangular trade,
 between Europe, Africa and the Caribbean

exploitation

the history of carnival
 West African carnival
 European carnival
 post-war immigration
 beginnings of carnival in Notting Hill
 local history of Brixton
 children's family histories
 oral histories
 British history topics taken into costume design, for
 example the Celts

Art

costume design
 study of traditional designs for carnival costumes
 working in variety of media:
 paint, clay, papier mache, tie dye,
 collage, paper engineering, fabric printing,
 wax resist batik, use of vegetable dyes
 study of West African fabric design
 mask-making from clay, card, papier mache
 appreciation of different styles in art through
 study of European and African artists

Religious and moral education

Christian tradition and carnival
 the meaning of Lent, Shrove Tuesday and Mardi Gras
 Traditional West African religious beliefs
 Caribbean religions — Rastafarianism,
 Pentecostal churches
 respect for cultures and beliefs of others
 shared values and rights
 co-operation and sharing
 the development of wonder
 caring for our world and each other



Personal, social and cultural education
developing respect
learning to co-operate
handling difference
building self-esteem
celebrating diversity

Music

History of Caribbean song forms
calypso, soca, reggae, rap, rapso
the development of the steel band
how to make a pan
links with African music especially the drum
performing and listening to music
writing songs

Dance and drama

Caribbean and African dance forms
self expression
discipline
story dramas
themes for costumes and dance —
for example birds
role-play
characterisation and mime
masquerading

Geography

maps of the world — trade and travel
Africa and the Caribbean
journeys
food and farming
the seasons
the environment and conservation
flora and fauna of the Caribbean
the route of the Carnival procession

Lambeth schools Carnival Parade 'Anansi and Friends' — Landsdowne Special School.

The common factors in the curriculum development in all the schools have been:

- The opportunity for teachers and children to work directly with experienced carnival artists and to improve their knowledge and understanding of the artistic forms and processes which make carnival so exciting
- The opportunity for the arts to become a central focus of curriculum work in a period in which arts have tended to be marginalised by concentration on the core curriculum.
- The extensive use of hands-on learning experiences for children and the opportunity for children to take ownership of both process and product in the form of carnival costume and performance.
- The involvement of parents in making costumes and in the enjoyment of performance.

Two teachers have written accounts of the development of the project in their schools.

Carnival in Stockwell Infants School

All teaching staff became involved because Carnival became part of the school's curriculum. Adult skills and expertise were shared and everyone was able to learn something new. Support staff already had many of the skills needed for costume making. We also tried to involve parents wherever possible. Some were willing to lead story-telling sessions based on their own experiences of Carnival or the Caribbean.

Even parents who had not previously come forward were happy to help with Carnival.

Member of the local African-Caribbean community came forward to help with a celebration of a festival that is special for them. We also discovered that some families were actively involved in MAS camps over the summer in preparation for Notting Hill. They had not previously told us this — and had considerable expertise to offer.

Inset sessions provided for teaching staff by the Lambeth project were very useful as some teachers have had little or no personal experience of Carnival. The Carnival artists were able to inspire everyone to *want* to celebrate Carnival and to enjoy the project.

The topic of Carnival was originally introduced to the children as part of their History, Geography and RE projects in February with Mardi Gras. We involved the children and their families in looking at personal journeys — taking opportunity to introduce map work.

For language work we looked at the different languages and rhythms of the Caribbean in story-telling and song. Alex Pascall, who led workshops in school based on these ideas, was a great inspiration to staff and children.

Displays around the school were all related to Carnival or the Caribbean. We also arranged a large collection of books in the lobby area for children and parents to enjoy.

We extended the topic of Carnival to looking at foodstuffs of the Caribbean, having Brixton Market close at hand to visit. As cooking has always featured in the infants' curriculum we were able to prepare snacks and drinks for our own school carnival and employ the expertise of primary helpers and parents.

Visiting artists also played an important role in music and dance tuition, especially in areas where we did not have such expertise in school, for example in the Steel Pan workshop and Dance workshops.

The designs for Carnival costumes used class topics:

Reception chose *In the Garden* (flowers and mini-beasts). Year One did *Outer Space* (sun, moon, stars, planets, rockets and space-women and men). And Year Two did *The sea* (mermaids, mermen, shells, fish, seahorses).

In making our costumes and banners for each class we employed textile techniques (tie-dye batik and paste-resist techniques). We had begun to teach these techniques throughout the school earlier in the year, and now put them to real use.

The children gained tremendous inspiration from the project, and their learning was enhanced in many ways, as these comments reveal:

'Learning through experience in practical workshops proved immensely valuable for the children, who were able to do rather than be instructed and were immensely excited by being able to realise their own designs from start to

finish. Their work also had a real purpose as it culminated in a public performance in school and in the Carnival parade. For the first time some of the most disruptive pupils showed a real interest in what they were being asked to do at school and were willing to co-operate fully with other pupils, artists and staff'.

'The project encouraged teamwork among staff and co-operation between children. Children acquired new skills and increased confidence in self-expression.'

'For some children the project was an important recognition of their culture and community. For others it increased understanding of a culture that might otherwise remain alien to them'.

'The school governors were impressed by the outcomes of the project and the status of some of the curriculum areas covered has been raised. Some parents came in to help in school for the first time ever and on the whole parents and friends and community were encouraged to see carnival included on the curriculum'.

Karen Mears

Lambeth Carnival Arts Project at Lansdowne School

Staff at our special school were cautious in their response to the prospect of Carnival on the curriculum. But through the INSET sessions for teachers the spirit of Carnival began to infiltrate and enthusiasm spread.

Our first artistes' workshop was led by Trevor and James, professional dancers. Their approach was not towards teaching specific dance forms, but through various games, mime and improvisation. They enabled the pupils to open up, explore their bodies in space, time, and in relation to one another. We saw pupils use balance, transfer of weight, free and flowing movement, individually and collaboratively, in ways we would not have thought possible. Here was the essence of Carnival today, expressed through the work of one black and one white artist working with children from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Dance was brought to us again near the end of the project by Zuriya Dance Company. This was a day of rejoicing in African mime, dance, rhythm and story. English nursery rhymes were set to Afro-Caribbean rhythm and song.

In the meantime we had welcomed Amaru into our school for two whole days' workshops. His genius in mask-making in the traditional African-Caribbean technique and style inspired pupils, staff, general assistants and students to create huge dynamic masks based on the pupils' original ideas. He told us the story of Anansi and Tar Baby as a focus for our theme of folk tales from the Caribbean. His performance so entranced the children, that many went around punching the air as they laughingly re-enacted the story in creole dialect. Other Anansi stories were read, composed and re-written by pupils in several classes.

The fundamental role of story was continued by children's writer, Errol Lloyd, who came to entertain the younger children with his story *Nini at Carnival*, poetry, hilarious rhymes, and some ingenious drawings.

Children took part in experimental print-making, tie and dye, batik and costume design. Resources such as artifacts kindly lent by an African shop, visits to the African Village, videos of Carnival celebrations in the West Indies and here in London, books, magazines and visits to the Horniman Museum and the Commonwealth Institute, all added strength to the project. We also watched a beautiful TV programme in the Natural World series on BBC2, narrated by Paul Keenes Douglas, about wildlife and folklore in Trinidad.

A weekly whole-school assembly was devoted to the origins of Carnival, its African roots and the transportation of people from Africa to the West Indies. Stories and writings by people who had themselves or whose parents had been slaves were explored in assemblies and classrooms. History and Geography lessons explored the facts and the Caribbean was put on the map.

The mask-making was time-consuming, (our pupils tend to work very slowly and need extra help in completing their masks) but the large scale of masks meant they could achieve greater success eventually than in manipulating very fiddly objects. Shops had donated materials in various colours and weights. A very large quantity of delicate, yellow fabric gave us the idea of making it up into wide-sleeved tunics, the children wearing black and white trousers, shorts or leggings underneath. Each class chose a predominant colour to be added to the tunic by way of decoration — long flowing ribbons from the scrap scheme or block-printed cloth panels made by the pupils. For example, two classes had contrasting tunics, tied and dyed cotton previously prepared in huge sheets by the children. Some of the youngest wore scarlet tee-shirts batiked with spider-web motifs.

Some pupils had worked on lettering designs in collage or silk-screen prints, for a banner with our school name and the words 'Crick-crack, break my back, stories'.

Our school carnival celebrations, to which parents and friends were invited for Caribbean food, fun and games and a visiting school steel band, all our children assembled in the hall and put on their costumes for the first time. The effect was magical, a flowering of creative brilliance, like a metamorphosis. Our banner was held aloft in front of the possession on the great day when all the schools shared Carnival in the street and Brockwell Park. Brer Rabbit, Anansi, Tar Baby led the assembly of multifarious beasts, dragons and winged creatures. On the hottest day of the year we saw Papa Bois, Mama D'Leau with her crown of serpents, witches, wizards, insects and spiders, while to bring up the rear followed a massive bull with the words 'Wire bend, story end' scrawled across its back.

Celia Snaith

Some evaluation comments from other schools

'The participation of teachers alongside their pupils in the learning process with the artists was a most valuable experience. The dedication of staff, students and a few parents was impressive. The strongest effect was the sudden flowering of achievement when on the day of our own school carnival all pupils assembled in the hall to dress up for the first time in the carnival costumes and masks they had made.'

'The development of children's personal, moral, spiritual, cultural and social education has been achieved in many ways. One class was intensely interested and personally affected by learning about the slave trade and how Carnival developed through it. Many of our black children showed interest in their African-Caribbean roots and history. White children were just as keen to learn about the folk lore, the wit, humour and customs expressed in African-Caribbean language, poetry, story and songs and were also affected by learning about the white man's exploitation of Africa. They were also keen to learn that many white people have in the past, and still are, fighting for equal rights for all races.. We think this work has led to a raising of respect, esteem and empathy in the relationships between pupils parents and staff.'

'The carnival bands' themes were taken up by different year groups and matched with their projects. Year 3 were studying Invaders and Settlers and looked at issues of prejudice and independence and slavery as well as doing mask-making and dance.. Year 4 explored the African connection in dance and music from all over the world. The world theme was reflected in their costumes. Year 5 took the theme of the Environment and selected stories from African folklore about caring for the environment. Their mask-making was linked to the stories. Year 6 explored St Lucia as a geography project and used this as the basis for their carnival work Altogether 320 children benefited directly from an enhanced curriculum and 40 parents became involved.'

'Involvement in an exciting project with an art and craft and music emphasis improved children's attitudes to learning. Black children gained more confidence, as well as a group of white children who underachieve.'

'Many of our black parents have expressed concern over negative attitudes to Africa from their own children and from white people. The project enabled the school to give black culture a focus and to emphasise the African connection with the Caribbean and with Carnival. It has encouraged debate with parents and governors on the importance of high visibility for black culture.'

This event was organised and financed almost entirely by the schools themselves, although with the support of the Chief Education officer, some backing from the Education Department and Lambeth Council press and publicity officers. The time and effort involved in organising this was considerable as negotiations with the police and with Lambeth

council amenities were complicated by the fact that this was Lambeth's first schools carnival.

When the assembled school left in a procession from Rosendale Infants and Junior School to go to Brockwell Park, it was the culmination of a great deal of hard work by artists, teachers, parents and children. Led by a lorry, with Stockwell Park steel band playing on pans, the Carnival procession, consisting of groups from each of the schools represented, made their way to the park Gardens. It was a most memorable and visually exciting celebration of achievement and a real learning experience.

The Advisor's Conclusions

A planning group of advisory staff were closely involved in the oversight and development of the project and someone from the advisory service chaired every planning meeting, and the work of co-ordination of the in-schools programme. Liaison between artists and schools was undertaken by a specially recruited co-ordinator, Clare Shepherd, whose considerable knowledge of carnival arts and artists was crucial. She described her involvement:

As co-ordinator I was occupied in a regular process of making decisions on the management of both human and financial resources including planning, recruiting, selecting, interviewing, and communicating with artists and controlling the budget available to each school, within a limited total resource.

Among the artists and participants who took part were: calypsonian Tobago Crusoe; oral historian Alex Pascall; Zuriya theatre performers; dancer and choreographer Creta Mendez; masks/costume makers Amaru Chatawa, Byron Rock and Danny; People War Carnival representatives; dancers Trevor Waldron and James Flynn; Carl Campbell Dance Company; writer and story-teller Errol Lloyd; steel-pan maker/tuner/player Aubrey Bryan; pan-player Frank Rollock; Kelvin Carballo and historian Cecil Gutzmore.

My priority was to get some of the best artists to carry out work within each of the schools.

An extensive photographic record has been kept of these developments both by the individual schools and by the primary and early years advisers. A video record has been made of selected workshops with artists and of carnival events both in schools and on the street. This was made with the co-operation of Community Education and with their continued support in editing will be made into a permanent record of the project. As well as being a memorable event, the Schools Carnival illustrated fundamental educational principles:

Children learn best and achieve most highly when:

- their interests are taken seriously and built on, and exploration and investigation encouraged
- they are strongly motivated to learn
- they are given time to develop work of quality and depth and can work at their own pace
- learning is based on practical and hands-on experiences and they are taught new skills
- learning is about whole and real experiences and is not artificially split into subjects
- they learn in collaboration with others
- their learning is supported by parents and community and seen as relevant to their lives and cultural and linguistic backgrounds
- adults have high expectations of them and give them real challenges and then support them in meeting them
- they enjoy their learning
- they can gain satisfaction and praise for real achievements.

All those principles were met in the project

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The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of Lambeth Education Authority.
