

International Connections; Limitless possibilities.

Sydenham School are forging the way in international connections, by taking part in a bilingual project with France and Belgium.

The prestigious venture is a two -year programme that will see students in year 9 collaborate with young people from six schools, across three countries, in two different languages. Working with professional playwrights, actors and theatre professionals each school will create short play scripts that reflect the lives of the young people involved as well as the communities, cultures and worlds they live in. The work developed will then become a shared vision, created across cultural lines, looking at common goals as well as the differences and diversity we share. The project aims to use the young people as a catalyst for new writing and inspire a new generation of theatre enthusiasts.



The three partner organisations who are spearheading the programme and coordinating the project are:

1. The National Theatre of Toulouse- France
2. The National Theatre of Brussels - Belgium
3. Boundless Theatre - London.

Teachers from Sydenham School

Miss Catchpole Subject Leader of Drama

Mrs Fontenelle Modern Foreign languages teacher

The drama group here at Sydenham began by taking part in a series of creative and practical sessions with the South African Playwright Jessica Sian. In small groups, students then began to write around the title 'What World I live in'.

"It was great working with Jess as she used her writing experience to help us develop and shape our work. She really got to the heart of our stories and tried to help us improve our writing. At dialogue." Drama student

In France and Belgium, the process was similar but slightly different. With generally smaller group sizes and working with English students rather than drama students, work became a series of duologies or short scenes surrounding political or societal issues relevant to the young people involved. Each school had a different playwright each using their knowledge and experience to help the students harness their creative ability.



'The plays prepared by the other schools were different in content and structure. They all seemed to work in pairs to create scripts that were conversations around issues that mattered to them' Drama student

Once all play scripts were completed and edited a team of professionals then began translating the texts to present to the schools overseas.

In London, we received all the scripts in English to share with our students and discuss the differences and similarities of the work created. We also received the originals to look at and compare with the French Language classes if we wanted. Many common themes emerged from the

writings of the young people like fast food, shopping, parental conflict, taking responsibility and boyfriends/ girlfriends but many differences also surfaced. School uniform was different, structure and freedom of school was different as well as the use of social media. We also noticed that common phrases that we use in London did not have the same meaning in French and vice versa. There was lots to discuss and analyse.



We then started to work on the variety of texts from the partner schools and selected eight to perform in a final showcasing of work.

This is the point where the project became ambitious. Rather than just perform the plays in French using the original versions as the other schools were doing it was decided to perform the plays in two languages using key phrases in French to punctuate the action and break up the spoken English dialogue. Now the easy option would have been to use the original versions of the text but instead it was decided to collaborate with a French class to translate the text for us.



This collaboration between the two classes allowed for flexibility of translation and could include the nuances of the English language as well as get the two groups to take ownership of the work. The aim was to also to allow for a sharing of skills and support the French students with the spoken elements of their course, helping them develop self-confidence in speaking in French in a real world context. The drama performance groups were then paired with similar groups of students from a year 9 French class and began a partnership of performance.

The French students then began looking up phrases of key selected dialogue and vocalised practicing pronunciation and tone to communicate meaning. They then taught the drama class. Both groups then began rehearsing and refining these texts for performance.

'It is great how the two classes are working together and really pushing their learning forward.'

G Fontenelle





The work culminated in a performance, which was attended by Boundless Theatre here in London and will be shared via video with the schools in France and Brussels. This gave both groups the chance to practice what they had learnt as well as become more confident in bilingual learning and performance pushing beyond their comfort zones of everyday learning.

'It was so scary speaking in French and English. It was something very new. 'Drama student

'Having to memorise a whole section of text in French was daunting as it was not just about the words it was the right inflection and tone. This is how I can see how it relates to drama and how your tone can change the meaning of the words. We had to get it right it mattered. 'French student

Two international meetings of teachers and educators took place to discuss each stage of the project and through conversations it was agreed that the Sydenham way of working was a model that all schools should follow next year to allow students to fully embrace the project and be immersed in bilingual learning. It was noted that the voices of the young people should be central to the work and the way the two groups collaborated at Sydenham was a great way to share the work and bring language and drama learning together.

The next stage of the project is to work with a new Year 9 group and develop a new range of play texts with an exciting playwright but looking at new and exciting ways to push bilingual learning and perform in a drama context.

'It has been great working with Sydenham School and to see the girls work develop. A lot of time and commitment is needed from staff and students but the end result is definitely worth it. The energy and commitment from Miss Catchpole has been fantastic and has definitely driven the work forward.' J Sian – Playwright.

The school and students look forward to hosting the next meeting of international contributors and professionals in December 2018 and the exciting work the students will produce.

Maylene Catchpole

Subject Leader for Drama