

New Approaches to Learning

Our Mission

Our mission is to bring together the voices of young people and adults to address disaffection and underachievement in education and the community.

We believe that the most successful form of education involves all stakeholders, promotes critical thinking and develops creative approaches to learning.

Background

COVO Connecting Voices is an educational charity with a track record in delivering highly effective tailored training programmes that support schools and organisations address conflict, disaffection and underachievement in education and the community. We work holistically with children, young people, their families, the elderly and relevant professionals in public and voluntary sectors.

COVO team of practitioners use an innovative, participatory and creative approach to engaging people in order to achieve long lasting changes. We offer tailor made projects that include consultation, training, mentoring and evaluation services designed to fulfil specific needs of schools and organisations.

COVO actively targets disadvantaged and disaffected groups - in particular young people - in some of the most deprived areas in London. Based in Southwark since 1999, COVO has worked extensively with children and families from our surrounding local communities of Southwark and Lewisham, and London-wide in the boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Camden, Westminster, Islington, Hackney and Lambeth. In 2010 COVO has expanded into Oxfordshire and Essex.

To date COVO has forged important partnership links with Goldsmiths University tutors and students from the department of Youth and Community Work and Southwark local authority.

COVO receives school referrals from Southwark Behaviour Support Team and was commissioned by Southwark Play Service to conduct a feasibility study of local play provision for Southwark Play Strategy 2006-2007. In partnership with Southwark Agency Supporting Schools Program (ASSP), COVO has developed Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning programmes (SEAL) in primary and secondary schools. Since 2007 COVO has worked for Southwark Children's Services to develop a self-evaluation toolkit and bespoke training for 25 supplementary schools to evaluate their impact on student's performance.

Services

Early Years

COVO training is designed to engage parents/carers in their children's learning by sharing creative skills, strengthening parent knowledge and confidence to support their child's development, and developing positive home-school links.

We deliver workshops with children using a combination of story telling, movement and play to enhance their learning while developing their social and emotional skills.

We offer specialised tailored programmes for teachers to develop their creative vocabulary and bring fresh ideas for lesson planning and the curriculum.

Play & Behaviour

COVO uses a whole school approach to transform children's experiences of lunchtime play by developing the school's workforce. We deliver tailored training for lunchtime staff designed to develop their skills and confidence to run new activities and effectively manage the playground.

We run games and classroom consultations during curriculum time to promote play as an important learning experience, while ensuring children and staff are involved in decision-making about how the playground is organised and designed. COVO supports the school's behaviour strategies and promotes reflection-based activities that enhance adult practice and help children take responsibility.

We mentor senior management teams in strategic development and offer schools on-going support to sustain activities in the long-term.



“ The work of COVO's specialist knowledge has a great impact on improving school's behaviour strategies for playtime with impressive results. ”

Southwark Behaviour & Autism Support Service



“ COVO’s approach to the often complex issue of working with marginalised young people has led to innovative solutions and insights into causes of disengagement. ”

Hugh Stultz - Out of School Hours
Study Support Manager,
Southwark Children’s Services

Young People

COVO works with disengaged young people at risk of NEET (not in education, employment or training) in schools and Pupil Referral Units.

Student engagement represents a key component in students’ achievement and success. We offer highly skilled interventions consisting in one to one support tailored to individual learning needs, movement and group based learning that support young people to develop social skills, self awareness and the ability to manage feelings effectively.

Working closely with teachers and support staff, management teams and parents/carers, COVO supports schools to adopt a systemic framework for engaging young people and develop an effective modular approach to learning.

Transition

Transition from primary to secondary school is a time of great upheaval for children, especially for vulnerable young people.

COVO prepares and equips children with the skills and confidence to be able to move smoothly from primary to secondary school, and remain on track in their secondary education.

We provide bespoke transition programmes for whole classes, small groups of young people and one to one support that feature a wide range of innovative, student-centred activities that develop emotional literacy and social skills.

COVO works with teaching staff and pastoral teams to share effective practices and gives expert advice on how schools can develop integrated social and academic programmes to support the transition process.



Movement Programmes For Elders

COVO delivers dance and movement programmes for the Elderly to improve fitness and general well-being while supporting those who may experience feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Workshops are designed to increase mobility and coordination skills, encouraging participants to express themselves creatively and develop as a result, greater movement and body confidence.

Sessions are socially engaging and use group discussions to explore themes related to themselves as well as the community in which they live.

“ In COVO training everyone sits in a circle so you can't hide. COVO listens to us and gives us space to talk. It's like a support group but with structured learning as well. ”

(Parent)



Insets & Cpd Training

COVO training is tailored to the needs of those working with children and young people in educational settings and out of school provision. We support organisations to become 'learning organisations' by developing models of good practice based on emotional literacy and reflection.

INSET training is aimed at improving practice to have a real and direct impact in the classroom, playground or organisation as a whole. In schools we cater for senior management teams, teachers and support staff across all key stages. We also offer professional development training in PRUs, voluntary organisations, supplementary schools and the local authority.

Programmes include sharing inclusive behaviour practices; self evaluation tools; using play, movement and storytelling in the curriculum; strengthening teamwork and communication structures and adopting a whole school approach to organizational change.

We deliver in-house training throughout the UK and provide off-site premises in south east London.

Art & Identity Projects

COVO develops workshops and projects with children, young people and adults using research tools, visual and performing arts to explore identity, history and the community in which we live. In particular projects promote dialogue and understanding between different cultures and generations while strengthening a sense of shared belonging in the community.

We run Black History workshops in youth and community centres and have been awarded funding from Heritage Lottery to train young people in Peckham in oral history techniques to interview local residents and trace the impact of migration into the area by using photography and videography to interpret their learning.



“ Movement helped me let go of my inhibitions and I felt more open to talk. ”

(Child ks2)



Dance & Movement Psychotherapy

Dance Movement Psychotherapy is a particularly helpful intervention for people of all ages who may find verbal communication difficult due to physical, cultural or psychological factors. Dance movement therapy strengthens the mind / body connection to improve mental and physical well-being.

COVO works with individuals and groups of adults and children to explore blockages to learning, develop relationships, trust and greater self-esteem. We provide programmes specifically designed to support students to re-engage in their learning environment.

COVO's professionally trained and experienced movement psychotherapists are members of the Association for Dance Movement Therapy UK.

Testimonials

Play & Behaviour Project

Heber Primary School, Southwark 2010

“ I have now worked with COVO on three occasions in three very different schools; at St Judes’s Primary at Elephant and Castle, New King’s Primary in Fulham and Heber Primary in East Dulwich. In each case I brought them in to improve provision in the playground.

Without an organisation like COVO improving playground provision can be very difficult. Entrenched attitudes and practices are hard to unravel; new practices are hard to put into place and even harder to sustain. COVO’s inclusive and democratic way of approaching change are highly effective. It is why I have worked with them in every school where I have been the Head or Deputy Headteacher.

Because COVO involve the whole community (children, parents, teachers, support staff),

momentum builds up and every one knows that a serious project is underway and that everyone has a stake in its success.

The fact that they come in for a year and hold regular meetings with everyone involved means that they offer more than a quick fix. Staff have the opportunity to voice and work through difficulties.

COVO have just finished a year at Heber. Playtimes are now more structured, Staff are more pro active, children are more involved in decision making and a greater range of activities are on offer.

I recommend COVO without reservation. I know of no other group who offer such a considered and well thought through package of support. ”

David Block, Head Teacher

Express Yourself, Movement & Storytelling Project

Chelwood Nursery School, Lewisham 2007

“ All of us parents started the training not knowing each other. By the end of the programme we were a team; we didn’t mind making fools of ourselves and enjoyed letting go and having fun. ”

Parent

“ From the start of the project it was clear that I was learning new methods from COVO to add to the curriculum, and that by the end, I would be able to use them in the classroom by myself. ”

Teacher

Reflective Parenting Project

Clyde Early Childhood Centre, Lewisham 2009-2010

“ The project was about involving parents in their children’s learning because for me this is key. Children are in Nursery 30 hours a week, the rest of the time they are at home, so if we are to make a significant difference to children’s lives, we’ve got to involve parents. We have run lots of projects over the years that have been successful in different ways, but COVO programme seemed very different to other services on offer. COVO’s approach is much more about involving parents physically and actively and that is what attracted me the most; it was something I wanted to see happen in the Centre.

The project made us think about how we approach family learning and highlighted different ways of engaging parents. I’ve always prioritised communication with parents and listening to parents’ views, but actually involving them in some of the activities that COVO

delivered, in the way they did, I think has been very beneficial. For example, a lot of parents in the evaluation at the end, referenced the value of looking at their own cultural histories in the sessions, and enjoyed the work they did on proverbs. Clearly it was something they found stimulating and helpful. We’ve learnt a lot from this project.”

David Westmore, Head Teacher

“ As much as you feel embarrassed about what you are doing, you’re letting yourself go. Other people that you don’t know are doing the same thing as you, so you feel it’s OK.”

Parent Participants

“ There are some teachers who feel hugely confident now, as a result of this project, and actually quite excited about developing the curriculum to make it more creative. Teachers have carried on using movement, role-play and storytelling techniques in the classroom and have done activities when COVO has not been there.”

Nikki Oldhams, Head Teacher

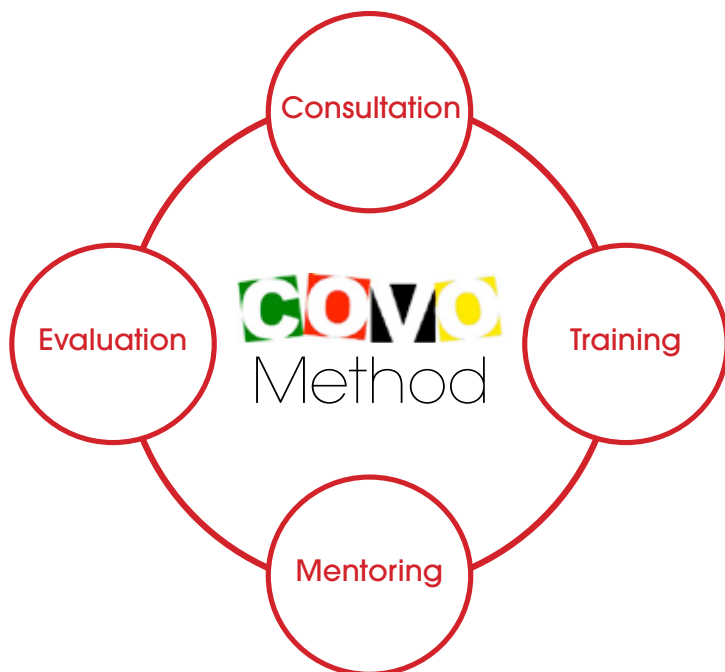


COVO Method

Systemic Approach

COVO's approach draws inspiration from educators P. Freire (Brazil) and T. Makiguchi (Japan) who believe in the role of education to advance social change by empowering students and educators to develop ownership and responsibility.

COVO develops projects with a whole school approach or systemic approach that responds to the needs of the schools so that students, teachers, staff and parents take an active part in development and implementation of the proposed changes. This approach ensures that the schools themselves develop their capacity to effect and maintain positive changes that are sustainable in the long-term.



Projects develop in four main phases:

Consultation

We consult with all beneficiaries to get a picture of the school/organisation and begin a process of reflection on perceived obstacles, current practice and needs. Based on our findings, we develop a bespoke programme.

Training

We provide training tailored to the needs of the participants and use a wide range of interactive and user-led activities designed to develop skills and engage adults and children in the development of the project to maximise learning benefits.

Mentoring

We mentor teachers, support staff and Senior Management Teams to implement new practice and lead organisational change with the expert support of COVO consultants.

Evaluation

We adopt qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating project outcomes, which include the use of questionnaires, interviews, and classroom workshops. We place importance on listening to participants' direct experiences of the project, and include this feedback in detailed project reports. COVO can provide video and photographic services for recording projects delivered.

COVO Team

COVO is made up of a team of trainers, consultants and practitioners specialised in Systemic Management, Dance and Movement Psychotherapy, Community Development, Visual and Performing Arts Education.

Between them they have years of experience in the field, providing valued training opportunities that draw on current and innovative practice, while rooted in education issues. Our training is approved by and registered with CPD providers Training and Development Agency (TDA) and the UK Register of Learning Providers (UKPRN Reference Number 10031233). All COVO workers and volunteers are CRB checked.



“ COVO’s approach to working with children and young people has always been holistic, addressing the different learning styles and educational, social and emotional needs of students. To this end COVO has integrated an innovative arts in education approach to its teaching and support of children and young people. ”

Hugh Stultz - Out of School Hours Study Support Manager, Southwark Children’s Services



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