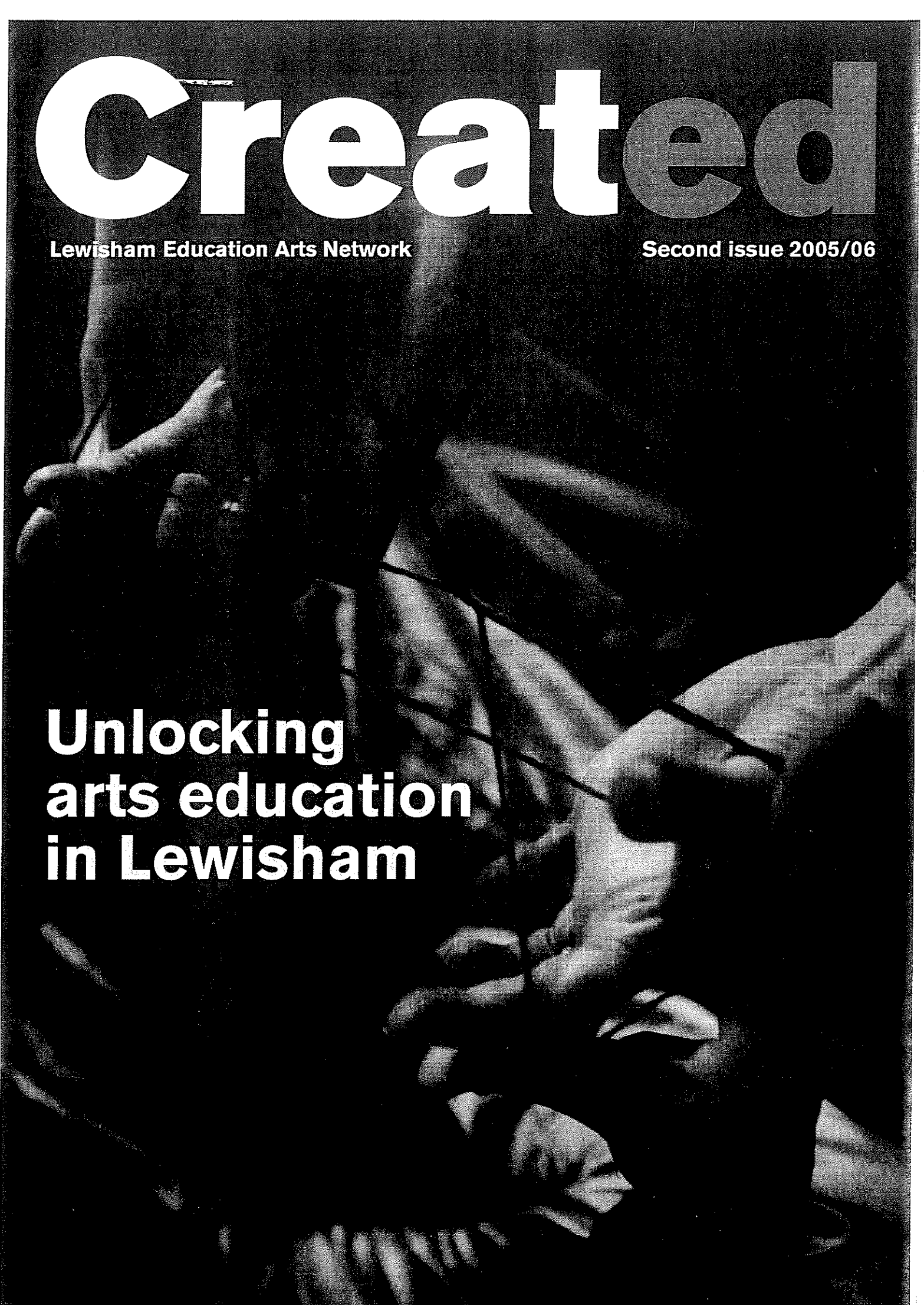


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Lewisham Education Arts Network

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**Unlocking
arts education
in Lewisham**



...but it's creative out

by Trish Lee of MakeBelieve Arts



February 2005. London. The snow began falling in the morning and by mid-afternoon the ground was covered in a white blanket. Beautiful, compelling, magical, the stuff of dreams and stories and yet how many London children were allowed to take advantage of this rare winter treat? How many spent that afternoon forced to pretend the teacher's story: that nothing unusual was happening?

The saddest part of this is that so many children here have never experienced real snow. Yet the pressures of the Curriculum and its Targets and Attainments meant that a lot of children sat watching through their classroom window as the magical white flakes

circled and fell. Teachers tried hard to get their classes' attention. One teacher I spoke to even confessed to closing her curtains, so frustrated was she by her pupils' lack of focus. Children who had already become skilled in the ways of school were more equipped to cope; they sat facing the front, or gave the impression of reading their books or writing their notes, with only the subtlest of glances at the adventurous world outside.

That afternoon, a ten-year-old boy sat at his desk. His head was filled with the story he had been acting out at dinner time. Tolkien's fellowship bravely crossing the snow-swept mountains. Each of his friends had a character taken from the book and, as they crossed the playground from one end to the other, they were transported into a world of elves and wizards, pursued by danger. Huddling together to avoid being seen by Orks, they fired imaginary arrows and sheltered from fierce winds; alone in the mountains, survival depending on their individual strengths and the courage of their companions. The classroom, on that afternoon, compared to this rich world of the imagination, had become a barren place.

That evening the boy told his story, and I found myself wondering how many

other children really remembered any of the subjects they were taught on that snowy afternoon. Imprisoned in a classroom, with only fleeting glances at the world outside and inside a burning desire to imagine and dream in the circling white flakes.

The snow barely lasted through to the next day, and then it was gone, a mere memory of a time and a game that may not return for a long time. But what a wasted opportunity, how often in the classroom do we find ourselves struggling to keep on task, to make children listen, to get through the various targets and levels that have to be taught by the end of each term only to shut out the real story that is happening outside the classroom.

Going outside on that snowy afternoon could have been a journey into the imagination. Children could have been taken outside and huddling together encouraged to cross the playground as a group in danger, not knowing what lay in store for them, or splitting up into smaller groups to search for a lost city or just allowed to play in the snow, imagine they were flying or find the story of why the cloud was breaking down. The richness of this experience becomes part of their stories and feeds back into the creative classroom, never to be seen as a wasted afternoon.

Pictures of staff and pupils from St Stephens CE primary enjoying the snow

