

## MAKING SPACE FOR CREATIVITY

### HOW TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS IN ENGLAND NAVIGATE MIXED POLICY MESSAGES

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Creative Learning, Creative Partnerships, Government Policy, School Leaders, Practitioners, Action Research Awards Programme

#### ABSTRACT

*Since the publication of the report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE, DfES 1999), there has been a steady flow of government policies and advisory documents which refer to the importance of developing the creativity of children and young people in England. These have been rooted in a range of interpretations of creativity and creative learning as well as sitting alongside a powerful policy narrative which focuses on school improvement, achievement of quantifiable performance targets and a strong audit culture. By analysing the experience of practitioners in the three-year action research awards programme Creativity Action Research Awards (CARA), this paper examines the ways in which teachers and school leaders have been able to reconcile these conflicting demands and shares some of their approaches and responses to the dilemmas that they face.*

## BACKGROUND: MIXED MESSAGES ABOUT CREATIVITY

The need to support the creativity of children and young people has been a stated aim of the New Labour Government in the UK since 1999. The definition of creativity set out in the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) report (DfES 1999) has since been widely used as a reference point by educators: 'Imaginative activity, fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value.'

The dilemma for schools and for agencies and practitioners which promote creativity as a core educational value is that there continue to be mixed messages from policy makers and agencies which support policy implementation about what is of real value within education and learning. Although not mutually exclusive there are three main policy drivers: firstly those which support the notion of creativity as a core value which has a place in all areas of the curriculum; those which identify creativity largely with the arts and cultural learning and those which place the highest value of achievement as measured by standardised national tests.

Creativity as a core value across the curriculum

One outcome of the NACCCE review was a three-year programme led by the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA) resulting in a guide for teachers and practitioners entitled *Creativity: find it, promote it* (2005). This identified the characteristics of creative thinking and behaviour as involving primarily:

Questioning and challenging conventions and assumptions

Making inventive connections and associating things that are not usually related

Envisaging what might be: imagining – seeing things in the mind's eye

Trying alternatives and fresh approaches, keeping options open

Reflecting critically on ideas, actions and outcomes

The government response to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2007) enquiry into Creative Partnerships and the Curriculum affirmed the view that creativity was a set of skills which applied across the curriculum and was not restricted to the arts and culture but was 'about problem-solving, exploring ideas, making connections and being imaginative and innovative. Creativity in science and maths are described as being 'just as important as in English and art'.

The reformed secondary curriculum, introduced in schools from September 2008, includes a framework of 'Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills' (PLTS) and draws on some of the descriptors in *Creativity: find it, promote it*. The framework comprises six groups of skills, each with a subset of skills, behaviours and personal qualities: independent enquirers, creative thinkers, reflective learners, team workers, self-managers and effective participators. In addition, the curriculum includes non statutory 'cross-curriculum dimensions' which schools are encouraged to utilise when designing their curriculum. These again refer to 'creativity and critical thinking' outcomes. Creativity has certainly moved into having an important position in the aspirations of this new curriculum.

## CREATIVITY AND AN IDENTIFICATION WITH THE ARTS AND CULTURE

Although the NACCCE report was robust in advocating the value of creativity across the curriculum, examples of practice in the report were almost exclusively drawn from arts and cultural contexts. Creative Partnerships (which resulted from one of the recommendations of the report) was set up under the auspices of Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and located in the Arts Council – thus appearing to reinforce a perception that creativity rests within the arts.

Six years after NACCCE a further review was set up under the auspices of the DCMS and the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) with a brief to review the position of creativity in schools. The resulting report *Nurturing Creativity in Young People* (Roberts 2006) maps out a framework for creativity starting with early years covering issues such as leadership, professional development and initial teacher education, curriculum, school design, extended services and the framework of regulations and support as well as introducing the concept of a creative portfolio. The report makes a 'moral' case for advancing creativity as part of the development of young people as citizens and learners, but then goes on to emphasise creativity as a preparation for work within the creative industries.

The Cultural and Creative Education Board (CCEAB) was set up in late 2006 in order to progress the outcomes of the report. Established under the joint auspices of the DCMS and the DfES (subsequently Department for Children, Schools and Families - DCSF), the Board drew its membership from two constituent groups – agencies with a national education remit for curriculum, standards and professional development of the school workforce and national agencies from the cultural and creative sector. However, despite the government's espousal of a broad creativity agenda there was no representation from the fields of engineering, technology or science. This again reinforced a perception that the government's understanding of creativity was instead rooted in the cultural and creative sector.

The most significant outcome both from the report and the committee has been the launch of the *Find Your Talent* programme, which makes the ambitious commitment to offering every young person between the age of 0-19 five hours of cultural experience a week. There is therefore a very strong policy narrative which associates creativity with the cultural and creative sector. But alongside this major commitment to the arts and cultural learning as an entitlement for young people, sits a strong performance narrative of policies and statements which place the highest value on achievement as measured by standardised national tests.

## VALUING THAT WHICH CAN BE MEASURED

In a system which continues to experience significant gaps in attainment, few would disagree with the overriding policy driver within the education and learning sector to 'break the link between social deprivation and low educational attainment' (DCSF 2008). However, there is evidence that the associated target-driven culture and the impact of the publication of league tables, which are seen as key elements in raising standards, places a pressure on schools to concentrate on those aspects of teaching and learning which will have an impact on outcomes that can be measured. As the name implies, the Standards Unit within the DfES and subsequently DCSF has had a prime focus on driving up standards. During the past ten years the unit has been responsible for a number of major national initiatives, including the literacy, numeracy, Key Stage 3 and assessment strategies.

The literacy and numeracy strategies introduced in the late nineties and the associated materials that accompanied them, plus wider curriculum guidance, including the QCA 'schemes of work' directed many schools and teachers towards a didactic pedagogy that often defined their roles as delivery agents of others' thinking. There was very clear guidance, interpreted by most as direction that not only defined what to teach but how and when to teach it. The *Excellence and Enjoyment* paper in 2003 (DfES 2003) seemed to offer an alternative approach that was welcomed by many, albeit with some degree of trepidation: although it recommended a more open ended and pupil-centred pedagogy, it did not clarify how teachers should reconcile this with the previous approach that was still in place, strongly underpinned by league tables.

Inevitably there is often a gap between the intention behind policy and the way in which it is interpreted and implemented on the ground. So the announcement in 2007 of a National Challenge programme which aims to ensure that 'in every secondary school, at least 30 per cent of its pupils will achieve five good GCSEs including English and maths by 2011' was interpreted as a punitive measure. No fewer than 638 secondary schools were identified as failing to reach this floor target, including a number of schools which, against other measures, had been identified as highly successful: for example, schools selected as a Creative Partnerships School of Creativity (i.e. schools which were deemed to have successfully placed creative process at the core of their work), or identified as one of the most rapidly improving schools in the country or lauded by Ofsted. Head-teachers felt that they were receiving mixed messages about their school's performance – on the one hand praised as successful, but then by another measure, which appeared to carry more weight, judged as failing. The Secretary of State's letter to schools acknowledges this: I also know that many of you feel that local and national media coverage of the National Challenge does not accurately or fairly reflect the situation in your school and the efforts which you and your staff are making. I have been clear from the outset, in all the statements I have made, that many National Challenge schools are, with great leadership and high aspirations, improving fast, and are not only on track to reach the benchmark but also ready to go far beyond it.

However, much of the emphasis in the strategy appears to focus on changing the governance and structure of the school rather than the need to influence pedagogy, despite the fact that research into high-performing systems has suggested that the quality of the teacher rather than the structure and governance of schools is the common factor in performance (McKinsey 2007).

In practice what has happened is that government policies aimed at promoting creativity and flexibility have been piled on top of accountability measured through success in a subject based national curriculum and standardised tests. The evidence from CapeUK's experience in schools is that there are still understandable tensions arising out of this mix of messages. Although some suggest that the dichotomy between raising standards and nurturing creativity is a false one, it is frequently referred to by teachers, head-teachers and others when they describe their experience of seeking to introduce creativity into a school curriculum. It is still not uncommon to hear of schools suspending their creative learning programmes when they hear that an Ofsted inspection is imminent.

The underlying paradigms of learning assumed by this perceived dichotomy are indeed contradictory: one assumes a linear and complete body of knowledge that can be learned, whilst the other assumes a dynamic relationship between the learner and knowledge that seeks to develop new and even unique knowledge.

So how do schools respond to these mixed messages when seeking to introduce creativity into the curriculum?

Our findings in this paper are based on a ten-year experience of working with schools to develop partnerships for creativity – first of all through the work of CapeUK and subsequently drawing on our involvement with the national government-funded Creative Partnerships programme.

CapeUK

Launched in the late 1990s, at a time when a focus on standards and a formulaic school improvement agenda was paramount, CapeUK aimed to generate systemic change in schools and place creativity at the centre of the school curriculum through developing long-term partnerships with organisations in the local community, businesses and creative and cultural sector organisations. Working with 24 secondary schools in the north of England, Cape commissioned the NFER to analyse the interpretation of creativity within participating school communities. As well as outlining the concept of democratic creativity – in which it is assumed that everyone can be creative – Harland (1999) identified three categories of response to the creativity message described as: comprehensive and broad; associative and partial; restrictive and traditional. These three categories continue to characterise the way in which schools respond to the challenge of enabling children and young people to develop as creative, fulfilled and effective adults.

Broadly, there are three typical responses which:

place the value of creativity at the centre of all curriculum planning and school management

use the arts and creative processes instrumentally in order to raise standards across the curriculum by increasing motivation and enlivening the presentation of core subjects, but with little emphasis on encouraging the creative capacities of young people themselves

isolate creativity to particular areas of the curriculum, above all the arts, and to particular times of the year, for example a summer programme after the important business of the school year is over.

There is no longitudinal study to whether the proportions relating to each category have changed during this time. However, in 1999 only one school in a cohort of 24 secondary schools was using the language of whole school change and embedding of creativity while over half the cohort were in the third category which is seen by some as a subversive resistance to the target-driven culture which dominates education – a means of saving 'a tiny ghetto of joy in a big mad world'. (Ross 2007). The overwhelming response of schools advocating for the value of creativity to the select committee (DfES 2007) and the significant number of schools applying for involvement in creativity programmes such as Creative Partnerships suggests that school leaders are now more confident about creative learning.

## CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Creative Partnerships (CP) is described as ‘the Government’s flagship creative learning programme, designed to develop the skills of young people across England, raising their aspirations and achievements, and opening up more opportunities for their futures’. It also aspired to ‘transform teaching and learning across the curriculum’.

Set up under the auspices of the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS 2001) and the Arts Council, the model brought artists and creative practitioners into schools to enhance young people’s learning in school through arts and cultural experiences. Although the rhetoric has now shifted to an interest in creative learning, given the fact that the bulk of practitioners available to work in schools are from an arts background, that the initiative was housed within the national arts and cultural agencies and that most of its co-ordinating staff come from backgrounds in the cultural and creative sector, it was perhaps inevitable that the programme is interpreted as locating creativity in the arts and culture (Neelands and Choe 2008).

CP was set up in 2002 as a pilot programme operating in 16 of the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas of England with similar aspirations to the initial Cape programme. Each CP area worked with up to 25 core schools and was committed to establishing long-term ‘sustainable partnerships’ between the creative and cultural sector and schools. By 2005 further government funding had enabled CP to expand to a further 20 areas, but once more with a limited number of schools in each area. Investment in the programme, and hence the funding available for selected schools, was significant but by 2004 the programme was under pressure to engage with more schools

Creativity Action Research Awards (CARA)

In order to extend its influence and reach, CP needed to explore alternative models which seeded ideas and processes with a lower level of investment. The CARA programme was one response to this imperative and has since gone on to become a model for the Enquiry School strand of the new CP framework (CP 2008).

CARA was based in part on the Best Practice Research Scholarships scheme (BPRS) which had been available to teachers between 2000 and 2003. Funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), and although relatively short lived, the scheme had generated considerable interest within the teaching profession. Each participating teacher had been awarded a scholarship of £3,000 to carry out school – focused research with support from a Higher Education Institute (HEI), Local Education Authority (LEA) or Education Action Zone (EAZ). By enabling teachers to determine and drive their own professional learning needs, BPRS was in stark contrast to the increasing emphasis on target-setting, top-down CPD and performance management which characterised much of government policy at that time (Furlong 2003; Hargreaves 2003).

Evaluation of BPRS (Furlong & Salisbury 2005) found that it had a considerable impact on teachers’ own professional development, their teaching practice, pupils, parents and colleagues, and that the scheme was well regarded by both teachers and school leaders. As such, the principles and processes inherent in BPRS sat well with CP’s aims of transforming teaching and learning.

The CARA programme merged the BPRS focus on practitioner research with the core CP process of partnership between a teacher and creative practitioner. Partnerships between a teacher and a creative practitioner received a grant of £4,500 to carry out a small-scale action research project around the broad area of creativity. In addition, the programme matched each partnership with a mentor from a background in HE, teacher development or creative

partnerships and arts education to support the enquiry element of the activity. Partnerships were also required to attend two one-day workshops organised regionally. The first of these sought to introduce the programme, explore the concept of creativity and give a brief introduction to the processes involved in action research or evidence-based enquiry: the second sought to support the enquiry process by sharing experiences, challenges and professional learning between the partnerships in each region.

The first phase of CARA was launched in the autumn of 2004. The purpose of the programme, as described on the Creative Partnerships website, was 'to support pairs of teachers and creative practitioners in action research partnerships' which 'will jointly develop a creative project and investigate the key elements and the benefits for their students'. The decision as to whether such benefits would relate to higher levels of attainment or development of creative capacities was thus left open to interpretation. CapeUK<sup>i</sup> was contracted by Creative Partnerships to shape, manage and deliver the programme from December 2004 onwards.

One hundred and forty five schools and over 100 creative practitioners in 104 partnerships<sup>ii</sup> across England, supported by a network of 52 mentors drawn from Higher Education, arts education and education management, were involved in this first phase. A second phase of CARA was launched in 2006 and involved 120 partnerships. Over the two phases of CARA the programme involved 240 schools, with at least a teacher, a creative practitioner and a mentor in each school – around 700 adults in total, working with over 7000 children and young people.

The programme therefore gives an invaluable snapshot of how creativity was perceived in a cross section of schools in England over a three year period from 2004 – 2007. As well as the applications, and reports from each of the selected school partnerships a number of meta analysis and evaluation processes (Comerford Boyes 2005; McGuigan et al. 2005; Burke 2006; Craft Chappell & Best 2007) have been carried out which give an insight into how teachers and partners navigated and, in some cases resolved, the contradictions, complexities and tensions of the environment in which they were working.

## **PERMISSION TO ENQUIRE**

Applications for the award give an illuminating indication of the preoccupations of teachers at the time of each wave of recruitment to the scheme programme and the extent to which teachers felt able to focus on creativity as an outcome in itself, rather than creativity and the arts and their impact on attainment within a subject area.

Over 61% of the phase 1 CARA projects initially focused on creativity instrumentally – as a means of enhancing learning in discrete areas of the curriculum – typically an arts-based project to improve writing. Only 39% of partnerships chose to concentrate on the development of creative capacities for their own sake without seeking also to demonstrate that this would lead to improved attainment in a defined area of the curriculum. However, calculated against the full cohort of applicants, the percentage focusing on the development of creative capacities per se reduces to nearer 11%. The first round of CARA had been introduced a year after the publication of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DCSF 2003) – a strategy for primary schools which represented a significant shift from the directive literacy and numeracy strategies which preceded it. Creativity was described, in this government document, as powerful way of 'engaging their pupils with learning' and a way of enhancing teaching of literacy and numeracy, so

while teachers felt that they had permission to explore creativity within the context of raising standards there was a lack of confidence that creativity was in itself a legitimate area of enquiry or capacity to be developed.

In the second phase of CARA, there was a deliberate attempt on the part of CapeUK and CP to shift the balance. A higher proportion of those approved for funding focused on the development of creative capacities with a smaller percentage wishing to explore creativity and the arts instrumentally in relation to attainment. The partnerships were supported to refine and refocus their research questions as a key part of the programme. Teachers were encouraged to think about what creativity looks like and begin to explore the elements of creativity in learning that excited or intrigued them. In most cases, this pointed the research more towards creativity and less towards the instrumental model. Inevitably however, impact on pupil attainment continued to be a key focus and this was usually described within subject frameworks.

	Focus on creativity	Instrumental use of arts and creativity
CARA 1 – 2004	39%(11%)	61% (89%)
CARA 2 – 2006	52%	48%

Both the evaluation of CARA Phase 1 (Comerford-Boyes 2005) and the analysis of CARA 2 (Craft, Chappel & Best 2007 ) refer to the difficulties practitioners experienced in managing the tension between the creativity agenda and the performativity agenda. However, many schools made substantial claims for their programme's impact both on the practice of teachers and in some cases the culture of the whole school. What became apparent was that some schools could contain the tensions and support creative developments, which had an impact on the whole school, whilst others could not (Craft et al. 2007).

Whilst some of the projects in phase 2 still pursued relatively closed outcomes in relation to the established curriculum and tests, many tackled far more open questions. It was these more open- ended, one might say creative, enquiries which led to the most radical shifts in practice and understanding.

## **ADULTS WHO LEARN**

Schools where the project influenced the wider school community had the following features in common (Craft et al. 2007)

They identified a rich enquiry question, which focused on children's learning and opportunities were taken for the teacher and partner to reflect profoundly on their practice

The research teacher was in an influential position within the school which enabled them to influence the leadership team or inform professional development within the school

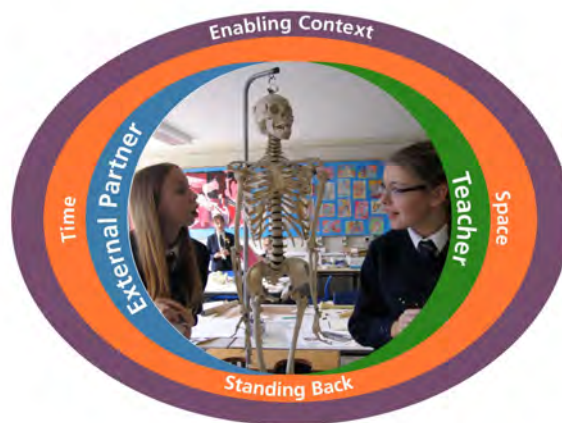
The partnerships demonstrated mutual respect with partners recognising each others' expertise and perspective



The partnerships had a reach beyond the confines of its own project and involved a range of people within the school community

And finally the leadership teams were open to change supporting the opportunities to explore pedagogy and practice which CARA offered and allowing exploration of issues beyond narrow attainment targets

Teachers and creative partners at the review sessions held part way through each programme often spoke of the powerful impact the collaborative enquiry process had had on their practice. The importance of creating a context for children to explore their own creativity and the need for the teacher to 'stand back' were themes which consistently characterised teacher and practitioner discourse whatever the age group of the children they were working with. Although the detail, nature and complexity of the activity differed, the dynamics which were being expressed and explored were consistent – relating to flexibility of space and time, relationship between teacher and learner and identification of a context which engaged the imagination and generated a motivation to explore ideas and work towards an outcome. For some, this reconstruction of their concept of the role of the teacher was a radical and 'life changing' experience with the experience of giving up control being initially difficult – even terrifying.



*Adapted from Cremin, Craft and Burnard (2006)*

## **INFLUENCE ON PEDAGOGY**

Adult pedagogies which were found to enable creativity within CARA were consistent with those identified in other similar programmes (Cochrane & Cockett 2007) and included allowing children choice and ownership of their learning, time for reflection, creating a stimulating environment, modelling creative action within a genuine

partnership, moving away from didactic teaching, where appropriate having high expectations and acknowledging different aspects of creative process – preparation, generation of ideas, incubation and analysis and action.

In contrast the factors in teachers' pedagogy which were found to constrain the development of creativity within CARA included adults making demands on children which were not attentive to their emotions; failing to acknowledge that creativity can be scary both for teachers and children; selecting inappropriate tasks which did not engage the children's imagination; failing to manage the relationship between freedom and structure appropriately and paying insufficient attention to practice and skill development and allowing insufficient time for the creative process. Teachers referred to a fear of the demands of the curriculum and testing, but also a fear of 'being wrong' as well as a limiting self-belief (Craft et al. 2007)

Teachers negotiate clashes of ideology every day within their wider school communities and their individual classrooms. The balance between freedom and control, pupil-generated and teacher-generated discourse, use of space and time, relationship between authority in the school and pedagogy are all issues that are navigated and interpreted within numerous nuanced interactions, between pupil and teacher, teacher and teacher, and teacher within the hierarchy of the school. The best way of illustrating these dynamics is to tell some stories

Move that desk just an inch further forward

The following interactions drawn from contemporaneous notes taken in researcher and mentoring roles give a flavour of how the school context can either validate or marginalise creative process:

*A teacher and creative practitioner were working with a group of Y7 pupils to prepare poems and presentations for the radio. They had negotiated a full morning session using a classroom generally used for business studies. The desks were arranged in rows and the pupils were working in small groups in these rows playing with language to develop poems about themselves. Although the process was generating enthusiasm, by mid morning the teacher and creative partner decided that they needed to reorganise the space so that the pupils could move around, work in small groups and perform their poems in the centre of the room. So the desks were rapidly moved to the edges of the room leaving the central space clear. The space was used to do some warm up activities and then young people rehearsed their presentations in small groups with teacher and creative partner moving around to offer support. Each group then presented to the full group who listened with concentration and respect for each others' presentation, and enthusiastically gave feedback. Several groups repeated their presentations to seek to improve them in response to the critique – and again the audience of the full group was patient and respectful. At lunch time the teacher, creative partner and researcher were replacing the desks into rows. The teacher whose room it was returned to check that all was back in order. He briefly asked how the session had gone, but without waiting for a reply or to find out about the process, rapidly moved on to focus on the fact that the front row of desks was 'one inch' out of alignment – it was important to get back to the proper business of education.*

The project was contained within a context where the professional learning was not valued and so the impact across the school was limited. Compare this with notes of a session observed in a CARA project aiming to generate creativity in science:

*Young people were working within small groups with quiet self-determined concentration, purposefully experimenting, modelling and trying out ideas as they built prototypes of joints in polystyrene and structures that moved in different ways. It was a messy creative space – a combination between a science lab, an art room and a*

*design technology studio. The teacher (Head of Science) and creative practitioner (visual artist) were moving around the room offering support as and when it was needed. At one point the Head-Teacher came in to have a look. The pupils were absorbed in their work and were not surprised to have the Head wandering amongst them. He picked up a model and Head-Teacher and pupil had a conversation about his model, what the pupil was trying to demonstrate and how he had overcome problems – in short a learning conversation. I have rarely seen such a purposeful, buzzing and reflective climate in a group. The young people were also consciously reflecting on their creative process, taking photographs as a record of when and in what way they felt they were being creative. A small printer in the corner of the room enabled them to immediately download and print the images.*

With full support of the head and the leadership team anything seemed possible. Practical difficulties were surmounted and the professional learning has been shared both within the school and beyond.

## **SATS IN THE PSYCHE**

The starting point for CARA projects as presented by CapeUK was that creativity itself should be seen as a high-value outcome rather than being justified by high test scores or performance. However, many teachers and partners initially found it difficult to step beyond the constraints of approaches to assessment which related to standardised tests rather than assessment as a process which supports and enhances learning by generating conversations about learning between teacher and learner.

## **THE BIG IDEA VERSUS ATOMISATION**

*A rural secondary school developed a competence based programme for its year 7 groups. The curriculum was based around one big idea – creating a fantastic tourist resort – an aquarium with facilities for all. The programme had caught the imagination of both the teachers and the children. Everyone was excited about the success and wanted to extend the process to Year 8. The enquiry focused on whether it was better to teach competences by explaining the competence at the beginning of each session. Each subject teacher chose a creative topic and then taught a series of lessons each of which was based on a particular competence. The process didn't capture the imagination and by atomising the skills it became a mechanistic experience. The pressure to produce tangible results in which the learning outcomes could be codified had meant that the big idea which had driven the process for the Y7 group had been lost.*

The school values professional learning. The CARA project sat within a large-scale curriculum change programme and so the learning from the enquiry has informed future plans in which the value of having a big idea, which acts as an imaginative space or context for learning, is recognised.

*One primary project wished to engage Year 6 children in selecting the creative practitioner to work with them in a science context. The children were to be involved in all stages of the selection process, drawing up a job description,*

*short-listing, interviewing and selecting the successful candidate. They were to work in small teams and to negotiate at each stage of the process. However, in planning the session with their mentor, both teacher and practitioner initially thought that they would assess the impact on pupils by measuring the effect of the experience on science SATs scores, even although this clearly bore little relationship with the processes the children were going to be engaged in.*

*Another primary school based partnership between a teacher and two practitioners from a professional ballet company explored whether creating a performance with a dancer and musician would inspire children to write more fluently and help them understand how to structure a narrative. The children (who were aged 7 and 8) read a story with their teacher, exploring character and plot through play to interpret and own the story. The children worked with the creative team once a week for two hours over a six week period, culminating in a full day's workshop and two performances to parents and fellow pupils. The children came up with ideas for the performance, worked in teams, made choices about which ideas to use and eagerly kept a diary which was their main way of communicating with the creative practitioners between sessions. With a purpose to their writing, the children were eager, at every session, to record their thoughts and feelings. They developed their vocabulary and ability to empathise with the characters. The teacher had collected vast amounts of data to enable her to analyse the children's learning but the practicalities of interpreting this for each pupil was overwhelming.*

## **BREAKING FREE**

However, as teachers and partnerships developed a confidence in the legitimacy of teaching for creativity they developed ways of observing and recording children's learning which were able to capture some of the dimensions of behaviour, attitude and approach which are the ingredients of creativity. Many relied on pupils reflecting on their own experience through video diaries, self reflection using images, photographs sketchbooks or recorded conversations.

However, the complexities of observing individual progression and development remain unresolved. The emphasis on Personal Learning and Thinking Skills in the reformed secondary curriculum poses a challenge to assessment processes. Whilst some progress has been made in defining what is meant by creativity in an educational context we are some way from being able to describe progression in creativity. In a world which demands accountability and evidence the simple test score still has major attractions.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is perhaps surprising and encouraging that in these pressured time so many schools have found space for creativity. Having found the space none of them report an unexpected dip in SATs scores or GCSE results. On the other hand, in spite of some positive anecdotal evidence there is no robust evidence that creative activities improve those scores. Whilst we might hope for a more coherent message, the fact is that English schools and teachers are going to have to live with the mixed messages and messages getting more mixed by the day. In the end it will be a

matter of what we believe is important for our children. The reports from the programmes, almost universally, describe the excitement and the engagement of the pupils, the improvements in self esteem, the surprise at their capacity for independent thought, the quality of the creative outcomes and so on and so on. What does it say about the SATs related curriculum that these things are considered to be so worthy of comment?

We can be hopeful about one thing that whilst the message is mixed it didn't used to be. In the lifetime of the CapeUK programme, creativity has moved from being a fringe activity hardly represented in curriculum or policies to a plank of policy if not quite a central one. The evidence is building that deep, long lasting learning comes from engagement in open ended, challenging and fundamentally creative activities.

## END NOTES

<sup>i</sup> CapeUK is an independent research and development agency focusing on creativity and learning, working with partners to explore and develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning which prepare children and young people for the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

<sup>ii</sup> A number of schools worked as networks pursuing the same enquiry area but within one project.

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