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Youth Voice in the work of Creative Partnerships

A report for Creative Partnerships

November 2009

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Table of Contents

Executive summary

Section 1: Introduction - Creative Partnerships and Youth Voice

Section 2: Research questions

Section 3: Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

3.2 Data Analysis

Section 4: Mapping youth voice

4.1 Young people in governance: design, delivery and evaluation of Creative Partnerships work

4.1.1 Young people in governance in schools – Creative Councils and Room 13

4.1.1a) Cameo: Kids Creative

4.1.1b) Cameo: Young consultants

4.1.1c) Vignette – student ownership of Room 13 ‘space’

4.1.2 Young people in governance in Creative Partnerships itself

4.1.2a) Cameo: Evolution of a youth board

4.1.2b) Cameo: Young consultants programme

4.1.3 Young people in governance in organisations beyond Creative Partnerships and schools

4.1.3a) Cameo: local authority cultural strategy

4.1.3b) Cameo: Urban Regeneration Body (URB)

4.1.4 Reflections

4.1.5 Recommendations

4.2 Positive relationships

4.2.1 How and which relationships improve

4.2.2 Affect and ‘emotional voice’

4.2.2a) Cameo: Pupil Voice Resource

4.2.2b) Cameo: Dance and Drama Engagement project

4.2.3 Reflections

4.2.4 Recommendations

4.3 Young people as co-producers of learning

4.3.1 Central and peripheral co-producer models: findings from School of Creativity applications

4.3.2 ‘School Environment’ projects and co-production

4.3.3 Young researcher models

4.3.3a Cameo: ‘Get In!’ student documenters project

4.3.4 Student-centred creative work

4.3.4a) Cameo: child-centred ‘critical’ learning

4.3.4b) Cameo: ‘Talkback’ - student creativity and new relationships

4.3.5 Developing peer relationships in co-production

- 4.3.5a) Cameo: co-production and classroom ethos
- 4.3.5b) Vignette: relationship work in a Year 2 classroom
- 4.3.6 *'Teacher voice' in co-production*
- 4.3.6a) Vignette: teachers' planning meeting
- 4.3.7 *Reflections*
- 4.3.8 *Recommendations*

4.4 Section 4 Further thoughts

Section 5: Creativity and participation

- 5.1 *Is creativity inherently participative?*
- 5.2 *Do creative practices allow a more authentic expression of young people's views and concerns?*
- 5.2a) Vignette – URB rap
- 5.3 *Imagining the 'creative' and 'participating' student*
- 5.4 *Is creative learning inherently student-centred?*
- 5.5 *Reflections*
- 5.6 *Recommendations*

Section 6: Access and Inclusion

- 6.1 *Inclusion and exclusion in 'cadre' approaches*
- 6.2 *Access to/by 'professionalised' youth voice*
- 6.3 *Voice and 'empowerment'*
- 6.4 *Reflections*
- 6.5 *Recommendations*

Section 7: Learning and participation

- 7.1 *Relating narratives – constructions of 'the other' in voice discourse*
- 7.2 *Youth voice and 're-seeing'*
- 7.3 *Reflections*
- 7.4 *Recommendations*

Section 8: Orientations towards voice

Appendix: Tabulation of data

Executive summary

1. Creative Partnerships' foregrounding of youth voice has resulted in some significant work and innovations, within schools and at regional levels in Creative Partnerships and beyond. This report focuses on areas of interesting practice, rather than offering a complete overview of how far youth participation has been developed across the whole of Creative Partnerships. It presents data on young people's roles in governance; on youth voice and relationships; and on youth voice in the 'co-production of learning'.
2. Creative Partnerships helped to raise the profile of young people's participation in the schools and other settings that we researched. It does this partly through its questions and 'demands' to schools that are also a condition of funding. It is not possible, of course, to state with certainty whether schools that already involve young people are more attracted to Creative Partnerships (and more attractive to Creative Partnerships) or whether Creative Partnerships is able radically to change practice. However, it can be said to shift or solidify it.
3. Some Creative Partnerships regions have pushed boundaries in including young people in governance, so that they have a say from the outset in Creative Partnerships work in their schools, and even in shaping regional Creative Partnerships programmes. This goes beyond more conventional approaches where young people participate during creative activities and in evaluating them afterwards. Whilst it is difficult to identify how far youth governance changes outcomes, adults report that it can enrich the process considerably. Many projects marked a significant cultural shift in 'how things are done', raising expectations that young people both can and will be involved at all stages of Creative Partnerships work and providing direct experience of the benefits this can bring. In some areas this has made Creative Partnerships' work particularly distinctive.
4. In responding to Creative Partnerships' 'demand' to make young people central to their work, schools often opt for a 'cadre' approach – establishing and training small groups of young people to spearhead change. These groups may focus primarily on directing Creative Partnerships work or contribute more broadly to developing dialogues about creativity and creative teaching and learning in the school. This approach is often presented as a pragmatic solution to culture change in large institutions or as a first step in developing wider participatory structures and processes. The timescale of the research makes the latter difficult to substantiate.
5. Where these cadre groups have worked successfully, they have challenged and inspired many of the adults working with them. It appears that they have the potential to raise individual adult's expectations of young people and of their capacity to engage in decision-making or in curriculum and other central school processes. Changing adult perceptions of young people in this way

should make an important contribution to Creative Partnerships' aim of developing challenging creative teaching and learning strategies in order to raise attainment. However, to maximise the positive impact of this work, teaching staff should be enabled to participate in it rather than only creative practitioners, as was sometimes the case in our data.

6. The young people involved in these initiatives reported positively on their benefits, which include familiarity with creative work and industries and with 'adult' processes (such as interviewing or research), increased skills and confidence in public speaking, and new kinds of relationships with adults.
7. Such cadres by their nature involve only small numbers of students at any one time. They may serve an important public and symbolic purpose for a school as evidence of its commitment to youth voice. However, it is important to consider how far these cadre groups influence central rather than peripheral aspects of school life, how their work, and the processes by which students come to be part of them, are perceived by peers, how they might gain credibility amongst both students and staff, and how they can evolve, develop, share skills and reach across different groupings within a school.
8. Youth voice work relies on adult support of various kinds, in providing access to skills, networks, and a range of material and cultural resources and facilities. Where initiatives have failed, a prime reason has often been the absence of such support. An analytic or evaluative focus on youth voice alone may obscure the need to recognise and support those adults.
9. The dependence of 'youth' voice on such adult support also has conceptual implications, because it suggests that adults – or more broadly mainstream cultures, practices and discourses – inevitably play a role in generating, directing and shaping 'youth' voice agendas, what can be spoken about, how and to whom: in this sense, pure 'youth' voice is a romantic myth.
10. We argue for greater attention to adult-youth relations and identities in participation practices. Our research provides ample evidence that Creative Partnerships projects can improve intergenerational relationships, at individual level and indeed in the classroom or even the whole school. This is true of work in a range of contexts and with a range of students, including marginal or 'disaffected' young people who can benefit from opportunities to experiment with new roles and identities. By challenging assumptions of capacity based on age, voice practices in particular may creatively destabilise adult and youth identities.
11. A focus on relationships also helps to draw attention to the affective dimensions of creative and participative work – how the process 'feels', how it is embodied and experienced at a personal level, and how this is communicated and shared with others. Such factors may be crucial in developing successful participative practices and structures.

12. The benefits of such work are however limited where programmes are outside or independent of the usual practices and structures of schools, where teachers are involved at only a superficial level or not at all, where others are not 'witnesses' to change and where usual school contexts do not support new identities and relationships. Opportunities for integration and dialogue need to be planned for and conscientiously maintained.
13. The notion of students as 'co-producers of learning' has been interpreted in many different ways by Creative Partnerships areas and schools. It can involve changes to peripheral aspects of school life, to significant but one-off initiatives, or to a rethinking of curriculum content and / or delivery, towards cross-curricular, topic-based approaches, and to greater partnership and dialogue (not only between adults and students but amongst students). Our observations lead us to believe that the last in particular can provide profound learning experiences for students and staff – although our main evidence here comes from primary schools, suggesting the greater challenges faced by secondary schools in this respect. Creative Partnerships Schools of Creativity are particularly committed to youth voice in central aspects of school life, and therefore should be a source of more evidence in the future of how these challenges might be addressed.
14. We found many examples where Creative Partnerships has had a significant role in moving schools towards realising 'co-production of learning' in distinct and creative ways. For instance, in projects to redesign school spaces, the involvement of professional expertise on the built environment is likely to have deepened reflection on its relation to learning. Some student researcher teams and student-organised voice conferences offer interesting examples of consulting a wide range of students through creative methods. The long-term partnerships that Creative Partnerships establishes between teachers and creative practitioners can model participatory and open-ended approaches that leave a legacy of positive 'dispositions' towards such ways of working. Creative Partnerships opportunities informed by the philosophy of Reggio Emilia in Italy have provided inspiration for some teachers to make substantial shifts towards student-led creative approaches.
15. 'Teacher voice' - developing teachers' sense of professional competence, encouraging collaboration and reflective practice – was frequently reported as being as important as youth voice, particularly in enabling teachers to make profound (and potentially risky) changes to their pedagogy and relationships with students. Many other factors are involved here too, as discussed in more detail in the research on Creative Partnerships and Creative School Change.
16. In addition to exploring youth-adult relationships, however, it is important to consider relations between and within groups of young people, and how participation practices affect them. This dimension appears to be somewhat neglected in evaluating voice work. Antagonisms arising from educational practices (such as ability setting) and youth cultural affiliations were reported

as powerful, negative, factors in young people's learning experience, and some voice initiatives potentially exacerbate such divisions. The challenging question of how far educational practices are compatible with voice as mutual, collective learning, needs to be openly addressed.

17. Many of those who participated in our research argued that 'youth voice' was centrally about dialogue within a school community and flourished best in schools where positive relationships and mutual respect *with* and *between* adults and young people were the norm, rather than existing in isolated 'projects'. Schools should therefore consider how their cultures enable an atmosphere of trust and respect, since in their absence youth voice initiatives are likely to be perceived as tokenistic.
18. We have also argued that we need to look beyond voice, to its contexts, including wider school environments. Evaluations of the sustainability and effects of participation should not consider only the particular project or arena where 'empowering' skills, resources, networks and relations were established, but consider whether and how those were or could be redeployed, rehearsed and re-enacted in different contexts.
19. Creative practices have had some significant effects on how youth voice is conceived and mediated. They may enable a wider range of views to be sought and expressed, particularly in non-verbal or less formal ways. However, the effect that this 'voice' might have is highly dependent on audience, interpretation and context. Expressions or outcomes of youth voice deserve to be interpreted thoughtfully and critically as part of ongoing dialogues: project planning needs to consider how to allow time and create the capacity to do this.
20. Ironically, 'youth voice' is often a way for youth to speak to adults rather than to other young people. We have found less evidence of young people's existing participatory practices, experiences and cultures being incorporated into youth voice initiatives. Creative Partnerships may wish to give greater attention to what and how these might contribute to the debate about participation and voice.
21. In some cases, accounts of voice constructed polarised, binary distinctions between the different groups involved and drew on deficit discourses about young people and teachers - constructions very likely to limit the reach and appeal of voice work.
22. We identify various 'orientations' to voice in the approaches we researched, to highlight different emphases in how 'voice' is conceived (implicitly or explicitly), the methods and technologies used to construct it, how young people are addressed and the discursive resources offered to them as a means to understand themselves and their work. These all embed values, assumptions and norms that affect '*which young people are able to speak, about what, and how*' and deserve analysis in planning and evaluating voice initiatives.

Section 1: Creative Partnerships and Youth Voice - Introduction

Creative Partnerships is a 'flagship creative learning programme', which brings schools and teachers together with practitioners from the creative industries in long-term partnerships that 'inspire both sides to reconsider how they work'. It foregrounds innovation and educational reform, positioning itself '*at the leading edge of curricular and pedagogic change*'. It has the challenging aim of encouraging whole school change – an aim that receives detailed critical analysis in another research project².

Creative Partnerships has a particular ambition for and vision of young people, and sees itself as having the capacity to promote and set an agenda in which young people's 'voices' can be heard. Its website states that 'Young people [are] at the heart of what we do' and continues:

*Creative Partnerships programmes **demand** that young people play a full role in their creative learning. We believe that our programmes are most effective when young people are actively involved in leading and shaping them, taking responsibility for their own learning. Creative Partnerships' programmes enable children and young people to develop the skills needed to play an active leadership role in school life'*

[website 7/5/09; our emphasis]

Much of our research report will be devoted to exploring what exactly is entailed in Creative Partnerships' 'demand' to schools, individuals and institutions that young people should be actively involved in leading and shaping creative learning. We use the term 'youth voice' as an umbrella term for a diverse range of work with and by young people, variously also referred to as pupil, student or learner voice, youth consultation, participation, involvement, engagement, empowerment, and so on. Jean Rudduck, the late, great advocate of 'pupil voice', has offered a broad definition of what this might mean: young people having the opportunity to have a say in decisions that affect them; young people playing an active role in their education and communities as a result of institutions becoming more attentive and responsive, in sustained and routine ways, to young people's views³. This approach encourages adults to 'work with' and 'alongside', rather than 'on behalf of', young people.

As an organisation, Creative Partnerships has addressed the challenge of youth participation at a number of levels since its inception in 2002. Sometimes participation has been embedded implicitly in Creative Partnerships' approaches to

¹ Jones, K. and Thomson, P. (2008) 'Policy rhetoric and the renovation of English schooling: the case of Creative Partnerships', *Journal of Education Policy*, 23:6, p.720

² The Creative School Change project directed by Ken Jones and Pat Thomson. See www.creativeschoolchange.org.uk

³ Flutter, J. and Rudduck, J. (2004) *Consulting Pupils: what's in it for schools?* London: RoutledgeFalmer
(We have substituted 'young people' for 'pupil')

its creative work, and at other times it has developed new formal mechanisms and spaces. In its early days, Creative Partnerships simply asked schools to include young people in evaluating projects. Latterly it has gone beyond this to suggest that using participative approaches is necessary and desirable not only because this endorses young people's rights, but also because doing so promises to benefit its own work:

Consulting young people and encouraging their participation is central to our work. We need to hear young people's views about what we do, and we need to find ways to draw on their creativity and insights, to maintain the project's dynamism and sustainability'

(David Parker and Julian Sefton-Green, foreword to *Consulting Young People*, 2007⁴)

By 2008 Creative Partnerships' commitment to young people was formalised in new documentation. Creative Partnerships (now run by Creativity, Culture and Education - CCE) asks all schools to complete a Creative School Development Framework (CSDF), a self-assessment document that helps to set out Creative Partnerships expectations. In relation to youth participation the CSDF stresses that schools should include young people in positions of governance. In 'teaching and learning' the CSDF asks schools to consider how pupils are involved in planning and evaluating personalised learning. In terms of 'environment and resources' pupils are expected to be involved at the level of 'display design'. Even so, many of the examples we give in this report show that some Creative Partnerships schools are already working above these levels - for instance, debating learning collectively as a community rather than only individually; involving young people in 'curriculum development and delivery'; giving them a role in 'staff learning and development'; and conceiving 'environment and resources' in imaginative ways that promote discussion of learning spaces.

Creative Partnerships has been described as an open and fluid organisation, with a 'programme of diverse activities' rather than a policy; as having followed a 'vernacularising trajectory' that allowed both Creative Partnerships regional offices and schools considerable autonomy in realising its aims⁵. This fluidity can make it hard to identify explicit 'policies', or a development trajectory concerning youth voice, rather, the aim of encouraging student participation is embedded in much Creative Partnerships discourse in ways that are open to interpretation. This helps account for the wide range of practices and approaches emerging in different regions and even in individual schools, alongside the fact that 'voice' is in any case increasingly part of the vocabulary of teachers and educationalists. Such diversity can be seen as a strength, potentially leading to increased enthusiasm and ownership of work that develops in response to local circumstances and needs, rather than in response to top-down policy initiatives⁶.

⁴ Bragg, S. (2007) *Consulting Young People: a review of the literature* London: Creative Partnerships

⁵ Thomson, P., Jones, K., Hall, C., (2009) *Creative School Change*. London: Creativity, Culture and Education. Download from www.creativeschoolchange.org.uk

⁶ Jones and Thomson, see note 1

To date, however, the stories of the different approaches to youth voice within Creative Partnerships have not been told. There has been no overall discussion, dissemination, evaluation and analysis of what has been achieved, of the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, of the impact and benefits they may have, and of directions in which such work may go in the future. Clearly, these stories need to be told and understood if Creative Partnerships as a learning organisation, and in its new form, is to benefit from the lessons of its past. For this reason, Creative Partnerships commissioned a team of researchers at the Open University to undertake a programme of research to respond to this need. The research began in 2007 and was completed in 2009. Its findings are documented in this report. The areas of enquiry and the research questions it was designed to address are given in the next section.

Section 2: Areas of Inquiry and Research Questions

The research project had four key areas of enquiry, each with several associated research questions. Inevitably, during the course of the project new questions and areas of enquiry emerged and these will be discussed in the body of the report. The original areas of enquiry and questions are as follows:

A Mapping: What kind of youth voice initiatives are being undertaken by Creative Partnerships and by Creative Partnerships schools?

Firstly we aimed to map and to describe different Creative Partnerships initiatives, at different stages of the creative learning process. We hoped also to identify some of the conditions that help make young people's participation successful as well as to identify obstacles to participation. To this end we interrogated the different definitions and understandings of 'participation', 'voice' or 'consultation' mobilised in Creative Partnerships initiatives; the methods and technologies (e.g. questionnaires, surveys, students' own research, consultation events) used to construct 'voice' within different projects; the audiences for 'voice'; and how all these factors affect what young people are able to say and how or whether they are heard.

B Creativity: is there a necessary relationship between the aspiration to develop creative learning projects and the aspiration to encourage youth participation?

In the process of mapping existing projects, we sought views and evidence on how far participative approaches are essential to creative learning and whether participation mobilises young people's creativity in different, more productive ways. We asked whether there was a convergence or divergence of views between different stakeholders (students, teachers, creative practitioners, Creative Partnerships staff, wider community members) concerning this relationship. From the point of view of young people, teachers and schools, we asked whether there was evidence that participative work initiated within the context of Creative Partnerships projects carries over into school curriculum more generally. From the point of view of Creative Partnerships, we looked for evidence that participation contributes to the maintenance of Creative Partnerships' dynamism and sustainability (in keeping with Creative Partnerships' aspirations), and if so how?

C Access: which 'stakeholders' are involved in Creative Partnerships projects that attempt to harness student participation?

To investigate access, we wanted to establish a profile of who is involved and to explore whether there are any noticeable patterns of inclusion / exclusion. We sought a range of views on the nature of young people's engagement in these projects and evidence for the extent to which they are able to build and capitalise on their access to 'voice' in other areas of their life. Also, we hoped to explore how

power relations played out between stakeholders as these relations are recognised as having the potential to either create or suppress voice.

D Learning: (How) does participation offer new forms of identity and relationships to schools, teachers, creative practitioners and students in the creative learning process?

Finally, we wanted to identify the skills and experiences, developed through participation, and to explore the nature of the identities and relationships between students, teachers and creative practitioners. In particular, for those involved in the various projects, we were interested to see how these identities and relationships compared with other social identities outside school and peer-group cultures within school.

We use our findings to make recommendations to Creative Partnerships about how best to progress its project in future.

Section 3: Methodology

Our project took its lead from those who expressed interest in being involved or being interviewed. In that sense, it is partial; rather than surveying all Creative Partnerships practice including areas where there is little youth voice activity, it focused particularly on those areas with an active interest and engagement in it, and on what they identified as relevant examples. But we should note here that in their 2008 audit of evaluations conducted by Creative Partnerships Area Delivery Organisations (ADOs) Woods and Whitehead found an absence of young people's voices in many of these documents. They recommended a '*strengthening of direct evaluation evidence and participative voice from pupils*' in these evaluations.

3.1 Data collection

Our study began with desk-based research into accounts of youth voice. For instance, we examined Creative Partnerships quarterly Monitoring Reports (reports from regional Creative Partnerships offices to the national organisation) for 2006/7, Creative Partnerships publications, evaluations, multi-media productions and so on. Our research perspective suggests that these *accounts* of youth participation are as important to analyse as actual practice. This survey led us to create an initial typology of the kinds of 'youth voice' activities in different regions.

Following this every regional office was contacted (36 in total), resulting in phone interviews conducted with 19 Creative Partnerships Regional Directors (Creative Partnerships RD) and/ or Programme Managers (Creative Partnerships PM). Sites for further research were identified through these interviews and were dependent on interest from schools and the teachers or creative practitioners involved and on their capacity to support our research. Very many did and we record our gratitude and recognition that they did this despite experiencing enormous pressures – as is sadly typical of many schools in the areas of socio-economic disadvantage that Creative Partnerships primarily targets. The range of schools and regions in which we undertook our qualitative data collection are listed (anonymously) in Appendix A.

Data collection in these sites took place mostly in 2008. Some of our accounts of practice are based on short visits to schools and other locations or events, or on interviews with key practitioners. However, we also developed 14 longer studies based on repeat visits to some areas, or more detailed analysis of youth voice 'products'. Our research involved a variety of methods such as interviews, focus groups, observation, 'shadowing' students, and collating multiple sources of evidence (photographs, students' creative work, minutes of meetings, schools' own research into or accounts of their work, DVDs produced by Creative Partnerships, and so on). We tried to elicit the views of those not directly involved in Creative Partnerships work, as well as those who were. Appendix A lists the kinds of methods we adopted in different research sites.

We also conducted four research forums with groups of young people towards the end of the research, in spring 2009, to share our early findings and seek feedback on them. Two of these involved students from two different schools. One forum

combined primary and secondary school students, the other three secondary students only. All involved a mix of students who had been directly involved with Creative Partnerships initiatives, and those who had not.

We interviewed 46 staff in schools, 35 creative agents or practitioners, undertook 45 visits to schools, organisations and events and observed or spoke to over 300 young people, in twelve Creative Partnerships regions. In addition, in 2009, we carried out some analysis of applications from schools bidding for School of Creativity status in 2008, looking for evidence of how schools understood pupil voice, where they located its influence, and how the applications' assessors commented on it.

3.2 Data presentation and analysis

Our data relates primarily to schools involved with Creative Partnerships prior to its re-organisation in 2008-9. As one part of this change, the Creative Partnerships programme is now delivered by Area Delivery Organisations rather than by the Creative Partnerships regional offices to which our report refers. The re-organisation also established three categories, of Schools of Creativity, Change Schools and Enquiry Schools. Change Schools and Schools of Creativity programmes are aimed at those schools that have a long-term commitment to adopting creative methods and approaches. Schools of Creativity are 'outstanding schools' that are engaging in 'cutting-edge research and innovative outreach with other schools'. Enquiry schools meanwhile engage in a small-scale creative learning programme targeted at a specific group of pupils and teachers⁷. Some of the schools we visited are still part of these programmes, others are not. However, we refer to the questions Creative Partnerships asks of these school types, and organise our presentation of data in response to them, in order to show the continuing relevance of the activities and approaches we observed.

The 'Cameos' we include here summarise some youth voice initiatives. They are drawn from either the long-term or shorter-term studies, and aim to illustrate how particular aims were realised, and / or to highlight interesting or innovative practice. A smaller number of 'Vignettes' present detailed accounts of 'moments' in our observations in order to convey the richness and complexity of practice.

Qualitative data analysis software (NVIVO) was used to identify themes and to collect the data in one place. The research team was careful to take account of the different positions of all 'actors' within our sites and to reflect critically on our own position and assumptions as researchers in the process of analysis. To theorise and understand our data, the research team members drew on different expertise and interests in areas such as discourse analysis, cultural theory, sociology, cognitive psychology, socio-cultural theories, including cultural-historical activity theory, new literacy studies; and read critical literature on participation and community development in local and 'majority world' contexts. In addition to the report, we have given conference papers and are preparing articles for academic journals.

⁷ Further information is of course available from the Creative Partnerships website www.creative-partnerships.com.

We would also like to recognise here the contributions made by our consultants to the project, Mathilda Joubert and Professor Michael Fielding (Institute of Education), by Dr Julie Leoni on the Schools of Creativity analysis, and by the members of our advisory committee: Professor Pat Thomson (University of Nottingham), Professor Madeleine Arnot (University of Cambridge), Professor Mary Kellett and Bob Jeffrey (Open University), Professor Julian Sefton-Green and Richard Clark from Creative Partnerships.

Section 4: Mapping 'youth voice'

This section responds to our first research question:

RQA: Mapping: what kinds of youth voice initiatives are being undertaken by Creative Partnerships schools?

The section explores a range of activities that we found or that were suggested to us as examples of 'youth voice'. It is structured around Creative Partnerships' own formalisation in 2008/9 of its 'priority areas and questions' to schools about young people's involvement. School applicants for Creative Partnerships funding are now asked to explain:

- how young people have been involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of the programme of work (we call this '**young people in governance**', 4.1)
- how they are establishing and maintaining positive relationships with young people (we call this '**positive relationships**', 4.2)
- how they are working as 'co-constructors of learning' with young people (we call this '**co-producers of learning**', 4.3)

In each section we outline the thinking about youth voice underlying these questions and show how Creative Partnerships schools, and Creative Partnerships itself, have formalised their commitments to young people. We then report on the kinds of projects and practices being undertaken under these headings and reflect on the opportunities and challenges of each approach.

This section is necessarily the longest part of the report, because it aims to provide an overview, both descriptive and analytic, of the kinds of activities and programmes we have researched. These are referred to again, but in less detail, in subsequent sections where relevant.

4.1 Young people in governance: design, delivery and evaluation of the work

The importance of including young people in decision making – a process often considered central to 'youth voice' - has increasingly been enshrined in legislation and guidance documents related to education, to the arts and to the wider political arena. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has spearheaded a rights-based agenda around giving young people a say in their lives and communities. It brings together the familiar view of children as in need of protection and provision (as objects of concern), with a different view, of children as individuals in their own right, as 'social actors', who can form and express opinions, participate in decision-making processes and influence solutions.

Creative Partnerships has a commitment to placing young people in positions of governance, to young people '*having agency, having power over what happens*' [Creative Partnerships Regional Director, West Midlands, Interview, 2007]. This agency includes, but is not limited to, Creative Partnerships programmes. It involves, as another Creative Partnerships Regional Director (North Midlands) suggested:

[Young people] having influence over the programmes, the delivery and also aiming to extend that voice and therefore that influence beyond their own sphere of activity into broader areas so that they're influencing education and creative work across the region and then eventually into the national picture as well.

[Interview 2007]

Creative Partnerships documentation identifies a role for teachers and creative practitioners in '*enabling young people to initiate, run and evaluate creative teaching and learning activities*'. The different stages of the process are significant here, as a Midlands-based Creative Partnerships Regional Director explained:

*There are really three phases of participation, **before**, **during** and **after**. The '**during**' is often the participatory practice, how are we going to make this film, who does what, all that kind of stuff. The '**after**' is often young people as researchers or evaluators, and there is strong evidence of that working well ... So during and after there are many examples, but one of the areas we felt quite strongly was missing, was the '**before**', who decides what and all the issues that arise from that, getting young people involved from the beginning.*

[Interview 2007]

Creative Partnerships' youth voice work here occurs in different contexts: in schools (4.1.1), in Creative Partnerships' own work (4.1.2), and in external organisations (4.1.3).

4.1.1 Young people in governance in schools - Creative Councils and 'Room 13'

Creative Partnerships requires partner schools to identify how they will enable children and young people to 'play an active role' in their programmes of work. Schools are asked to clarify how they will involve pupils – and this means not only in evaluating particular projects in which they have taken part but also in the planning, delivery and dissemination of it. In order to become a Change School or a School of Creativity, partner schools must explain and evaluate how pupils are involved in decision making and leadership, and how young people might be '*leading through advocacy*'.

Creative Partnerships cannot directly control how schools interpret and implement these requests, since Creative Partnerships operates at arm's length from schools. One (South East) Creative Partnerships Regional Director, discussing some application forms from schools for the 2008/9 funding round, commented with some exasperation '*they are saying they'll use the school council – but really after three years with us, they should be able to go further than that!*'. Nonetheless, Creative Partnerships has been able to encourage schools to think carefully about to involve young people in Creative Partnerships programmes.

Many schools achieved this by setting up '**Creative Councils**' – also variously titled 'Think Tanks', 'Arts Councils', 'Kids' Creatives', 'Creativity Councils' or similar. Such Creative Councils involve a small number of students who help oversee their school's Creative Partnerships projects or programmes, sometimes from the earliest

stages of planning through to evaluating them at their end. They are often trained for this role, including through visits to organisations in the creative industries.

Selection processes for Creative Councils varied, but it was very common for teachers to select students they thought would benefit from the work, especially in the first year of a project. Whilst this was pragmatic, their choices could risk strengthening rather than lessening peer hierarchies in a school. Whilst teachers were certainly committed to going beyond merely the most 'academic' students, those we met often already held other positions of responsibility within the school, such as being on the Student Council, were actively involved in school life, or were on 'Gifted and Talented' registers. Indeed, some Councils were offshoots or subgroups of the School Council⁸.

In other cases elaborate selection processes were put in place for young people to join the Councils, including application forms and formal interviews, justified as being what students would experience in the 'outside world'. Where an existing Creative Council was recruiting new students, this process was sometimes handed over to the current members; at other times adults retained control over it. Some young people argued that these were fair processes as *'everyone had a chance to apply'* (Y10 girl, youth forum, 2009), others felt that *'many people get left out'* (Y9 girl, youth forum, 2009). An interesting consequence of such rigorous processes is that the students thereby selected may have come to see themselves as particularly creative, or to see creativity as a special preserve. By contrast, an example of a more egalitarian process comes from a primary school where children were selected for roles as (creative) 'mini-agents' by drawing three names out of a hat, in front of the whole class. This not only publicly demonstrated confidence in the abilities of all children in the class, but also sent a message that 'anyone' could be creative.

The size of the Creative Councils varied, but inevitably represented only a small percentage of students. The six we visited had between 10 and 15 students with one of 30, and the Creative Partnerships reports from different regions that we studied suggested numbers from three to a dozen or so. Our research focused primarily on Creative Partnerships-related initiatives, but we should note that in some cases, the Councils were just one amongst a range of active committees, either student-led or on which students were represented. We were more sceptical where Creative and School Councils seemed to constitute the sole evidence of a school's commitment to youth voice, given the limited numbers of participating students.

The extent to which group members shared and communicated what they did with their peers also varied; their work was not seen to require representativeness or accountability in the same way as elected School Councils, although some Creative Partnerships Coordinators and senior managers were keen to celebrate

⁸ Our finding here accords with NFER research, which also suggests that Creative Partnerships work is more often targeted at upper streams in schools. See Eames, A., Benton, T., Sharp, C., Kendall, L. (2006). *Final report: the longer-term impact of Creative Partnerships on the attainment of young people*. National Foundation for Educational Research. Available at www.creativitycultureeducation.org/research-impact/showcaseresearch/nfer-attainment-and-behaviour,41,AR.html

achievements and raise the profile of creativity in the school. Where Creative Councils were involved in planning creative events and conferences at the school, or projects that changed its learning environment, the work had deadlines and a 'production' focus. Students to whom we talked often pointed to these proudly as tangible evidence of their achievements. The following two cameos offer illustrative examples of how some of these selection, planning and production processes operate.

4.1.1.a) Cameo: Kids Creative, Red Primary, North

Red primary school is in a former centre of the cotton and textile machinery industries in the north of England. Currently, in the borough in which it is situated, 65% of the residents have low incomes exacerbated by high proportions of economically inactive people and the health of the overall population is one of the poorest in the country.

The school identified a group of ten children called the 'Kids Creative' drawn from year 2 to year 6. Kids Creative have their own notice board, which they designed themselves, next to which is a 'creative box' into which they encouraged other children to put their own artwork and photos of creative lessons for display.

In the second year of the Creative Partnerships work, in 2008, the Kids Creative helped choose the creative practitioners to work with the school. Teachers whittled 27 applicants to 10 and the Kids Creative then shortlisted 6 individuals to interview by reading their application forms and scoring them out of ten. Here, the adults admitted persuading the children to reconsider their rejection of a candidate the adults knew and rated highly. Children also worked with the Creative Partnerships co-ordinator and creative agent to come up with a set of questions to ask at the interview. These included, 'What do you do for a living?', 'Are you likely to fall secretly in love with a teacher?' and 'Tell us your favourite joke'.

Two Kids Creative members were involved in the interview process, one year 6 and one year 4 pupil, both girls. The interviews were conducted around a table in which the pupils were given equal status to the adults. They asked some questions, made notes on each candidate and were asked for their opinions after the interviews. The interviews had a more informal tone, partly due to the children's questions and presence, although the young people involved took their role as decision makers very seriously. Many of the creative practitioners addressed the children directly and engaged them in conversation and discussion. Teachers were keen to elicit the opinions of the young people involved, and expressed surprise at their level of response, which they considered both thoughtful and useful in considering who to appoint and where the candidate might best work within the school.

As this cameo suggests, Creative Councils worked under adult guidance if not leadership – partly because young people needed to be helped to understand notions of creativity, the creative industries, recruitment processes and so on. In

addition, adults needed to provide facilitating structures – for instance, enabling students to take time out of classes, to meet in an attractive venue, to meet often enough, with enough time, and asking the ‘right’ questions, to which young people could respond meaningfully. Some Creative Partnerships Regional Directors admitted that participative processes could become ‘*pretty functional*’ (Creative Partnerships RD, West Midlands, 2008) unless the adults involved were skilled at working in these ways. When they ran well, however, such Councils could provide two-way learning experiences: in Red primary, children learnt about fair selection procedures, whilst adults learnt about what mattered to children and how insightful their contributions could be.

4.1.1b) Cameo: Young Consultants at Blue Secondary, Midlands

In this large, multicultural secondary school (situated on the outskirts of a Midlands city, within a ‘New Deal for Communities area’, which is ‘*one of the most deprived*’ in the city) a group of 30 young people worked with the school’s creative partners in making decisions about the school’s Creative Partnerships programme. Much of this work was initially based around the school radio station, funded and developed with the school’s creative partners and Creative Partnerships.

The assistant head and school Creative Partnerships co-ordinator selected a mixed group, including students who had been identified as technically skilled, those who were academically but not necessarily socially successful, and those who were close to exclusion. These Young Consultants (YCs) were taken to other radio stations, creative and cultural activities and events. Creative practitioners worked closely with them to plan whole school events and cultural programmes and to produce short films, a website and radio shows. One of the latter won a competition, although it appeared the shows could not be broadcast effectively in school due to malfunctioning equipment and lack of technical support. Nonetheless, the radio station, initially seen as the preserve of ‘geeks’, has become so popular that students have to be turned away from it.

From September 2008 a group of young consultants began working with the creative agent as an advisory group planning and commenting on future creative work. Teachers present at their first meeting reported being surprised that the young people did not have any ‘silly ideas’ and being impressed that they seemed aware of other initiatives around school. One teacher commented that they ‘*are actually taking notice of what’s going on in school, it’s not just a building that they come and run around in*’.

The teachers were also surprised by the way that the creative agent ran this session, as the creative agent explained:

The idea is that ... everyone talks at the same time and let’s just see what comes out of it and the teachers are really kind of wanting to jump in and say will you all listen to the creative agent more...everyone’s just writing down

ideas and putting their hands up when they really want to say something and everyone listens...this isn't quite how lessons run.

One young consultant (Y8 boy) explained that the experience has '*made me feel involved and I've actually been able to talk to adults without them ignoring me.*' A young woman student (Y10, youth forum 2009) not directly involved with the scheme described the young consultants as '*like the school council but they **do** more for the school*', a perspective that – whilst it also reflected on the comparative lack of adult support given the School Council – implied that the young consultants had developed genuine credibility amongst at least some students.

The Blue school cameo points to a number of positive outcomes. Firstly, adults' expectations of young people were raised. This was a common finding from 'successful' governance projects. As one Creative Partnerships Regional Director (South East region) suggested, '*Teachers are very surprised by what young people can achieve and actually also creative partners are quite surprised by what young people can achieve as well*'. A Creative Partnerships Director in the national team explained why this is so important:

The most common thing that teachers say to me is, I had no idea my children could do that. And that is the problem. Why does education not work? Because you have such a low impression of what your children are capable of.
[Interview 2007]

Secondly, the YCs gained an increased sense of involvement in their education and increased confidence when talking to adults. Finally, the popularity of the radio station, despite its initial 'geeky' associations, may have raised interest in achievement more generally.

The creative agent's description of her meetings with the young consultants implies that traditional classroom practice and power relations may operate as a barrier to creative expression. Another initiative that tries to challenge these is **Room 13**, a concept that originated in Scotland in 1994 and has now developed into an international network or movement. Creative Partnerships has supported two Room 13 projects in primary schools in England. The premise of Room 13 is that a professional artist in residence shares a studio space with young people, doing her or his own work but also engaging with the students who attend (during lunchtimes and on a quota system during lessons). Equally importantly, a committee of students takes responsibility for the studio's daily organisation (ordering supplies, ensuring it is well maintained and harmonious) and fundraises to meet, at a minimum, the studio's running costs. The philosophy behind Room 13 thus articulates discourses of social enterprise and of creativity, and in its expectations of children expands understandings of children's capabilities, perhaps going even further than Creative Councils in the management and control it aims to give to young people. (R13's founder, artist Rob Fairley, comments that he prefers to talk about 'adults of different ages' rather than adults and children). It can lead to some surprising moments, as this fieldnote suggests:

4.1.1c) Vignette – student ownership of Room 13 ‘space’, south coast

[My first visit to Room 13 in Purple Primary, a school with higher than average numbers of FSM and SEN in a southern seaside town]

*Two boys rush in with a photocopy of a giant ruler, which they then set about gluing to the walls. I observe my reaction – I'm initially shocked to see them doing this: they haven't even asked permission from an adult! Then I realise that of course, if this is **their** studio, they can do what they like in it, and they are simply demonstrating their sense of ownership and entitlement. I look around and begin to notice other photocopies stuck directly onto the walls, including some lovely, life-size ones of children upside down. So in a very real way I am reminded that this is a different kind of space, where different rules apply.*

[Fieldnotes, March 2008]

The difficulty adults have accepting that children are capable of this kind of governance was well illustrated at a presentation about Purple Primary's Room 13, where an audience member asked if the studio would ‘*turn into Lord of the Flies*’ without the presence of an adult – evoking one familiar image of children as feral and vicious without the civilising or restraining influence of adults.

As with the Creative Councils, however, adults (particularly the professional artist) play a crucial role. In Purple Primary, children's management of the studio was still being negotiated at the time of our visits in 2007/8, as both children and adults developed their capacities to take on new roles. A further challenge was how far the ‘different kind of space’ Room 13 provided could encourage creative teaching and learning elsewhere in the school (an aim fundamental to Creative Partnerships).

4.1.2 Young people in governance in Creative Partnerships itself

As well as school-based initiatives such as Creative Councils, some Creative Partnerships regional offices have encouraged groups of young people to influence Creative Partnerships programmes at a regional level. Selection practice varies: in some cases Creative Partnerships staff interview prospective candidates, in others they ask schools to nominate young people, or they work directly with schools' Creative Councils.

These groups of young people engage in similar practices to Creative Councils (though on a wider scale), such as planning and evaluating events, commenting on Creative Partnerships programmes in the area, contributing to Creative Partnerships recruitment, and giving presentations. In one (south west) region a group of young people was asked to explore, ‘*What is creativity, what is a creative teacher, what's a creative school?*’ coming to the conclusion that, ‘*a creative teacher was somebody who was still learning and who was always learning*’, according to the Regional Director [interview 2008]. Several Creative Partnerships regions have regular ‘youth voice’ conferences, where young people take responsibility for every aspect of organisation including marketing, publicity, documentation and evaluation. In November 2008, Creative Partnerships supported the launch of the ‘Manifesto for a

Creative Britain', a document handed to the Secretary of State for Culture. It was based on an 18-month research process involving Creative Partnerships school students who produced the 12 points in the manifesto, as well as an Ipsos MORI survey of 3,000 students. The launch, at Tate Modern, was run by young people from the schools that drafted the manifesto, and was attended by up to 500 young people.

The young people who are part of these teams often work for a sustained period of time and receive specialised training: one Midlands-based Regional Director suggested this encourages *'emerging confidence and strength and new ways of working'* and allows a more equitable partnership to develop between the young people and Creative Partnerships regional office staff. The young people we talked to were very enthusiastic about the personal gains that resulted from their participation. They were also honest about the perks involved such as *'getting out of school'* (Y8 boy, Blue secondary school), free taxis, food and a range of other Creative Partnerships freebies. As with the Creative Councils, such privileges had in some cases created 'envy' from their classmates and led to debate about who got chosen to participate in these groups.

In comparison to their experiences at school, young people reported different ways of working, and different rules of participation in these initiatives. They claimed that some creative practitioners were *'like friends or colleagues'* rather than teachers (Y8 boy, Blue Secondary). One Y10 boy reported that he'd *'never felt part of a team before'*, a Y9 boy that *'ideas flow more freely because you aren't afraid of voicing your opinions. You know that whatever you say will be considered'* (both White secondary school). Another reported that there was *'no teacher student hierarchy thing. We just sat and talked about what we wanted to do'* (Y8 boy, Blue secondary). Creative Partnerships provides time and space to move beyond the usual codes and conventions normally associated with school, offering young people *'space to develop their ideas, thinking and confidence so that they can then share their ideas'* (creative practitioner, Midlands). Of course, much of this might come from the opportunity to work in smaller groups, with adults who had no particular time pressures or predetermined objectives, as well as from young people's positive predisposition to the work.

A key challenge here is how far such extra-curricular projects can have a lasting impact upon school cultures and thereby ensure a legacy after Creative Partnerships funding ends. For example, a group of young people described the different approaches and relationships that they encountered with the adults on the Creative Partnerships programme, but were unsure how this might translate into their grammar school environment where relationships were described as *'very different'* (Y9 boy, Pink school). Their school Creative Partnerships co-ordinator similarly remarked that *'we don't quite know what to do with them, how do we use them?'*. As with the Creative Councils, the groups were reliant on adult support of various kinds, and where they worked less effectively it seemed that their schools were unable or unwilling to prioritise staff time for such external processes. Creative Partnerships staff and creative practitioners argued in our interviews that at best school staff should be involved in such programmes and that at least it was

necessary to have 'feedback loops', in order that schools and a wider range of young people could benefit. The cameo below shows how one Creative Partnerships regional office adapted its practice in response to these kinds of dilemmas.

4.1.2a) Cameo: evolution of a youth board, Midlands

A Creative Partnerships Regional Office in a large Midlands conurbation convened a city-wide youth board, chosen by teachers from a range of inner-city secondary schools, to develop its skills and experience in consulting young people.

At its inception, this initiative had an educational, audience-building aim, taking students to a range of 'cultural experiences' from ballet to live performance art. Through this the young people came to comment critically that they had no say in what was being programmed. Creative Partnerships therefore helped them commission a new piece of performance-based work for a local arts festival. The students discussed its marketing, production and evaluation alongside gallery staff where the work was performed and gained Arts Awards for their achievement.

Subsequently, Creative Partnerships staff moved away from this arts focus to integrate the board's activities more closely with Creative Partnerships work in schools, partly because of falling attendance. The remaining youth board members thus organised, managed and evaluated a city-wide conference imagining education in the year 2025 (a topic the adults involved admitted they 'pushed them towards'). The board commissioned a theatre company to work with it to shape this event and devise creative workshops to stimulate debate around the agreed topics. Eighty-nine young people from six secondary schools across the city, with their teachers, attended the event.

Youth board members wrote about what they had gained from their involvement:

The youth board is an amazing opportunity. We get to make changes, and do things which really matter, without being stuck in a classroom. We get to organise events and conferences for young people and collate their ideas so that adults and the people in charge of young people's lives have an insight into what we actually want done. At the same time, we learn a great amount of things which will certainly help us in the future, and of course, have a load of fun!

Y10 boy, Pink secondary school

I have faced lots of challenges such as having grown up meetings and being treated as an adult and not a minor to the people who come to the meetings.

Y9 boy, Pink secondary school

The students then helped recruit a new cohort, visiting five Creative Partnerships secondary schools, giving presentations, answering questions, conducting interviews, making decisions about who should join and then helping to train them.

The example of the youth board has subsequently been used to inspire new Creative Partnerships schools in this region to consider how they can use students to shape and evaluate their programmes of work, and has provided experience for the Creative Partnerships staff of participatory work with young people. It shows how young people can act as mediators between their Creative Partnerships regional office and local schools. The next cameo shows how young people's involvement and participation in Creative Partnerships regional governance can be extended even further.

4.1.2b) Cameo: Young Consultants programme, Midlands

One central England Creative Partnerships region has had special responsibility for raising the profile of youth voice within the national organisation since 2005. Under their Regional Director, and assisted by the City Council's interest in young people's participation, it has taken a lead in including young people in its planning, delivery, recruitment and programming. Each Creative Partnerships school is required to appoint a small team of 'Young Consultants' who, according to the Regional Director, are then trained with a focus on *'the professional development of those young people as partners in their creative partnership'*. The aim is to mature and develop the young people's experiences over a sustained period of time.

The Young Consultants programme led to some inspiring moments, as the Regional Director explained [interview 2007]:

Over three days 28 applying organisations were effectively auditioned by the groups of Young Consultants who attended creative workshops provided by the applying organisations and individuals and then gave us feedback on their experience. That was a phenomenal experience on a number of levels. It set the agenda so that it let people know that we were serious about young people's participation in decision-making, and it put the fear of god in some of the practitioners – who'd been on a very good living from education up until that point! It was a fascinating experience.... the first major 'line in the sand' moment where we went from not having young people involved, to having about 180-200 involved in making decisions at quite a high level about who would join the programme

The Young Consultants (YCs) are involved in regular conversations with creative agents and practitioners, as well as with teachers. They are given opportunities to participate in events and training outside school. For example, they have helped to organise, deliver and document national Creative Partnerships conferences. They interviewed prospective creative agents (that is, people who work across schools and over a long term)⁹. They have also been recruited to work as young consultants by the local council

⁹ The job of a creative agent is 'to work with the school leadership team in order to support the development of creative learning and to contribute to school improvement. This is done by establishing a creative learning vision for the school that is closely linked to the school development plan. The Creative Agent fosters an enquiry based approach and supporting partnerships' – Thomson, P, Jones, K., Hall, C., (2009) Creative School Change. London: Creativity, Culture and Education.

and other bodies that are interested in young people's views. When the Creative Partnerships regional office became an Area Delivery Organisation, the YCs chose its new name.

In the future, existing YCs will support the training and development of others through '*mentoring, coaching, acting as champions for the work*' and new YCs will work on a rotational basis, spending one year learning about the role, a second year developing their expertise and a third year training new recruits.

As this cameo suggests, the Young Consultants programme brought about a significant cultural shift, marking this Creative Partnerships region as distinctive and principled in its commitment to youth participation and setting a benchmark for how other organisations should expect to work with it. It had influence within Creative Partnerships itself, encouraging other Creative Partnerships staff to reconsider how they might extend their own understandings and making it less legitimate to plan work without young people's input.

4.1.3 Young people in governance in organisations beyond Creative Partnerships and schools

Creative Partnerships also supports young people's inclusion in decision-making processes in other organisations, so that they can contribute to local policies and practices that affect them. Such projects develop young people's civic, cultural and political capabilities, and therefore relate to youth voice in terms of the young person as a citizen and rights-bearer. Since Creative Partnerships' key work is generally seen as that which goes on in schools, these projects are fewer in number, although often high profile and sometimes resource heavy.

Creative Partnerships work here depends on local contacts and opportunities - for example where regions have a supportive council officer or department, a 'children's champion', or other local organisation prioritising youth participation, which for their part value Creative Partnerships' network of contacts with schools. Creative Partnerships has supported national initiatives in their local area, such as the Model United Nations General Assembly. Creative Partnerships has also directly funded such work. For instance, many of the urban areas in which Creative Partnerships works are scheduled for regeneration, and Creative Partnerships has developed projects to involve young people directly in debates about their local area and how they would like it to change. (Thomson et al have identified urban regeneration and raising aspirations as key, interlinked, themes in regional Creative Partnerships Directors' understanding of their work¹⁰). One outer London Creative Partnerships region established a website and a mobile multi-media suite, which it described in a report thus:

A high profile, brand-aware project that facilitates dialogue with young people about the regeneration agenda, and which provides a space (the website and Lab) in which young people can create high quality media to share and promote their views.... The

¹⁰ Thomson, P, Jones, K., Hall, C., (2009) *Creative School Change*. London: Creativity, Culture and Education

project demonstrates our commitment to young people's voice. It aims to demonstrate to private and public sector decision makers that engaging with young people has value beyond ticking a box. It also aims to demonstrate that if you get the product and the branding right, you can attract private sector investment in young people and cultural/ creative activity.

Creative practitioners are employed to support young people to express their views through creative means. This arrangement could bring its own dilemmas, as a creative practitioner (working on the project in Cameo 4.1.3b, below) acknowledged when she remarked that she sometimes found it hard not to intervene – ‘*you do worry because it comes back on us*’. That is, the more public nature of this ‘voice’ has consequences for the adults working alongside young people, who may feel that they themselves will be judged by the outcomes.

Similarly, selection processes for such groups were sometimes influenced by schools’ performativity agendas. For instance, in one project that brought students from different schools together, the creative practitioner commented that schools had sent their ‘star students’, who they felt would present the best ‘public face’ of the school to an outside audience. Another creative practitioner (working on a website at White secondary school, West Midlands) also suggested that ‘*sometimes schools will give you their best pupils when they know that something might be published*’. The relative rarity of such projects enables schools to expend their ‘best resources’ on them.

Interviews with those connected with such projects suggested that where appropriate agreements were not made with external stakeholders at the beginning of such processes there was a risk that young people were let down, in that their ideas were not taken forward or their expectations for the project were not met. Such participatory work is often costly and therefore difficult to sustain. The timescales to which external organisations operate do not always correlate with those of the young people involved - young people cannot always meet very often, especially where several schools must agree and arrange such meetings, but external processes cannot ‘wait’ for them. However, many adults believe that this type of work can give young people a genuine experience of ‘real world’ processes, which can impact on other aspects of their lives. They also point out that these initiatives have the potential to shift relationships with others in their local community as one Creative Partnerships regional director (South East, 2008) explained:

The area where the school is, is all up for rebuilding, and [the students] did a whole promenade performance from the school through the subway, which they made into time tunnel and you came out the other side and they had re-imagined what their shopping arcade and community would look like in 10 years time. They had got an empty shop front that they had taken over [to show] how they would like it to look... All sorts of people [came to it]. The Council Members, the local people from the council, some parents, the teachers from school that were not involved in the project, other students - a range of people. It was very visible so you had people walking past, who were

just at the shops, saying oh what's going on. ... and they had to go and speak to the market traders, now normally the market traders hate the young people because they are a pain in the neck to them and so they had to have a different kind of conversation which was interesting.

The next two cameos illustrate some of the benefits, but also precautions to take and dilemmas that might be faced, of involving young people more widely in governance.

4.1.3a) Cameo: local authority cultural strategy, West Midlands

One Creative Partnerships regional office in the West Midlands set up groups of young people from thirteen schools to work with creative practitioners in researching and reflecting on their local area to inform the local authority's Cultural Strategy. The project came about because the local authority, and particularly the individual at the head of the development team, was committed to including young people's voices in future plans for the city. Creative Partnerships here found *'interested audiences for our work with young people,'* and were able to engage in discussions and come to clear agreements about the remit of the work, which could then be communicated honestly to the young people involved. The Creative Partnerships Regional Director explained:

We were very clear that their voices would inform the thinking of those people that were developing the cultural strategy but we were also very clear that they couldn't expect their ideas for the city to be taken on and realised, that that wasn't part of the brief of the project, but it might have a future.

[Interview, 2008]

The young people worked with creative practitioners to identify ten possibilities, which the council discussed with the young people and which are now part of the published Cultural Strategy. In addition feedback loops were established where the young people were invited to hear what adults had said about the Cultural Strategy.

The Creative Partnerships Regional Director went on to comment:

Young people were enabled in a way that they typically weren't enabled and they could see where the ideas were going as well. And I think for some teachers it changed the way they started to talk to children. For some practitioners it changed the way they viewed children as collaborators. It gave them new mechanisms for how they would engage with them as partners.

4.1.3b) Cameo: Urban Regeneration Body (URB), North

This project took place in a northern port town, whose local iron / steel production and shipbuilding industries were largely destroyed in the 1980s and where plans were being drawn up to regenerate the waterfront as a site for leisure including yachting and golf.

Creative Partnerships shared offices with the regional regeneration body, which responded positively to Creative Partnerships' suggestion of developing a 'youth voice' on regeneration. Creative Partnerships brought together around 20 students from five local secondary schools and colleges to develop plans for the area, as well as to gain skills in research and consultation. Membership of the group changed each year. In the year of our visit (2008), two schools had invited students to volunteer, resulting in noticeably more diverse representation than from those where teachers had selected students.

Young people on this project have conducted research projects on youth views of the town, made videos, developed a website, visited other regenerated urban areas, redesigned neglected areas of the town, given presentations, and run workshops for other students, with the support of creative practitioners. The Creative Partnerships officer admitted that the regeneration body might have self-interested motives for being seen publicly to support such 'stakeholder consultation'. However, it also meant that the project was well funded – with sums of around £60-70,000 a year that would be hard for Creative Partnerships or schools to find, but were tiny in the overall regeneration budget. Interestingly, the young people were not involved in discussing or controlling this money. Creative Partnerships' role was in part to help students find creative and innovative means of sharing their views. The project was notable for its strong 'branding' and design, and students used varied communication methods such as projecting images and messages on to the side of buildings at night. The URB students expressed a range of reactions to their experience – one was cynical about the impact of the group arguing that,

This is helping me progress my career rather than change things ... I just think all the big guns have already made all the decisions, they've already spent all the money, they've worked out what they're doing, nowt we can do is going to change that.

By contrast, others were surprised and pleased that adults seemed so willing to listen to them, one suggesting that,

Everybody is getting a chance to add to it so they feel like they're being heard, and that's a start.

4.1.4 Reflections

The evidence we gathered concerning young people in governance has highlighted several key issues as follows:

- Creative Partnerships involvement helped to raise the profile of young people's participation in the schools and other settings that we researched. Many projects mark a significant cultural shift in 'how things are done', raising expectations that young people both can and will be involved at all stages of Creative Partnerships work and providing direct experience of the benefits this can bring. In some areas this made Creative Partnerships' work particularly

distinctive.

- Adults repeatedly told us how 'impressive' and capable young people involved in such governance projects proved to be, how they rose to its challenges, and how seriously they took their work. The experience seems therefore to have helped change individual adult's ideas about young people and their capacity to engage in decision-making. This finding reveals tensions concerning a primary focus of youth voice work. Should this be to develop young people's skills, to change adults' perceptions of young people, or both?
- Adults also reported that young people's involvement enriched decision-making processes as they learnt about young people's perspectives and reflected on their own – although it is unclear how far it substantially altered outcomes (adults delimit students' areas of activity, and frequently admitted to shaping discussions to get the results they wanted).
- The young people involved in these initiatives reported positively on their benefits, which include familiarity with creative work and industries and with 'adult' processes (such as interviewing or research), increased skills and confidence in public speaking, and new kinds of relationships with adults.
- In all cases where such groups have been judged a success, they have been ably and often extensively supported by adults (and where they have failed, a prime reason has been the absence of such support). This is importantly practically (because a focus on youth voice alone may obscure the need to recognise and support those adults) and conceptually, because we need to be aware of how adults inevitably shape 'youth' voice agendas, what can be spoken about, how and to whom: in this sense, pure 'youth' voice is a myth.
- Governance projects by their nature involve only small numbers of students in a school and the 'voice' produced is often primarily directed towards adults rather than other young people (symbolised by the broken equipment of the radio station at Blue secondary, which often prevented broadcast of programmes that elsewhere won prizes - cameo 4.1.1b). They may serve an important 'public' and symbolic purpose for the school (providing evidence of a school's general commitment to student voice, and a personable group of young people who are used to working with adults). But it is important to consider how other young people perceive them.

4.1.5 Recommendations arising from the research

- Creative Partnerships should continue actively to promote practices that extend, and challenge assumptions about, the capabilities of young people. Doing so is very likely to contribute to its broader aim of developing challenging creative teaching and learning strategies in schools.

Some key issues here that both Creative Partnerships and schools might address are:

- Selection procedures for governance groups. How far do the groups represent a cross-section of the student body as a whole? Are they gender balanced? What other positions or status do those students already have in the school? How are students selected, and what messages do different selection processes give about the work and about creativity, not only to the young people involved but also to their peers? An 'arbitrary' selection process, for example, may be more risky, but communicate more positive messages about creativity and ability than teacher-, self-selection, or even 'democratic' processes.
- Communication with peers. How visible are the governance groups? How do the groups represent their work to others? Is their work framed within notions of solidarity and accountability to a wider community, or of specialness? Are they seen as working on behalf of other students, or as an isolated elite? How do they connect to other governance groups within the school? What can be learnt from good practice by Schools Councils about gaining credibility and support?
- Skills-sharing. How do groups evolve, recruit new members, rotate roles, enable existing members to pass on skills, and so on? Which activities require the accumulated expertise of governance group members, and which could potentially draw in a wider range of students? (For instance: in assessing new school projects or potential creative partners, some familiarity with Creative Partnerships may be useful; but devising questions to ask at interview could be done by a whole class. Some visits to creative industries, conferences and so on could include non-Council members).
- Resourcing, and recognition for adults directly involved (both teachers and creative practitioners). Governance groups require adequate funding (attention should be paid to the relative proportion of resources they absorb). Support for them is time-consuming and should be recognised and rewarded when successful. It involves a range of skills from administration of meetings, communicating and mediating between different groups or organisations, to establishing positive and egalitarian relationships, framing tasks and objectives appropriately, and maintaining young people's enthusiasm. Training and / or skills-sharing may both be helpful.
- Communication with other adults in schools. To maximise the positive impact of this work, teaching staff should be enabled to participate in it rather than only creative practitioners, as is sometimes the case. Creative Partnerships should ensure that all Creative Partnerships projects are linked in with schools and involve school staff directly and as fully as

possible. This should help embed and sustain young people's participation, as well as offering positive experiences for staff.

4.2 Positive relationships

As Mannion observes¹¹, improved relationships between adults and young people are increasingly recognised as a central, rather than a peripheral or coincidental, outcome of participation work. This comment underpins his argument that we need to reframe children's participation as being fundamentally about child-adult *relations*. Lodge links relationships to learning, arguing that: *'It is the relationships between people, the ways in which they communicate, share the construction of knowledge and develop new understandings that create the sustainable learning'*¹².

Creative Partnerships accords relationships an important role in its questions to schools. For example, Enquiry schools are asked to evaluate, *'How satisfied were you with the quality of relationship building that took place throughout the project between practitioners, teachers and young people?'* Change Schools and Schools of Creativity are asked to consider, in project planning and in midpoint and endpoint conversations, *'What steps have you taken to ensure that positive relationships are developed between teachers, practitioners and young people?'*

Questions about positive relationships relate to all Creative Partnerships work, not only to activities specifically designated 'youth voice'. Our research provided much evidence of how intergenerational relationships had been improved or transformed, but this should be seen in the wider context of Creative Partnerships' research and evaluations, from which similar findings have consistently emerged.

One might ask whether good relationships are necessary or sufficient for youth voice, or indeed what is meant by 'positive'. It is possible to imagine a school where 'positive' but hierarchical relationships are the norm and there is little 'student participation'. Equally one might argue that good relationships are essential before youth voice can have any meaning, and that existing tensions are likely to be exacerbated by introducing youth voice activities into a context where negative relationships pertain. As a Creative Partnerships coordinator at a West Midlands secondary school acknowledged *'there's this mistrust and it's a significant barrier. The students want to move things forward but we're really having to build up relationships here'*.

4.2.1 How and which relationships improve

'Good respect - it's a two-way thing' (Y9 boy, youth forum, 2009)

We have already provided evidence of 'governance' projects renewing adult-youth relationships, especially where young people demonstrated maturity and commitment in working inside 'adult' processes. More generally, many of the

¹¹ Mannion, G. (2007) 'Going Spatial, Going Relational: Why "listening to children" and children's participation needs reframing.' *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 28 (3): 405-420

¹² Lodge, C. (2005) 'From hearing voices to engaging in dialogue: problematising student participation in school improvement' *Journal of Educational Change* (6): 125-146

teachers we interviewed described how working with creative practitioners helped them establish more positive relationships. They often referred to how undertaking different activities and roles gave them new perspectives on individual students. A teacher at Red Primary suggested that the forms and conventions of 'creative approaches' enabled teachers to understand the wider capabilities of their students and see beyond curriculum targets, providing *'a real chance to see young people being more creative, having this opportunity to be more relaxed, seeing a side to them that you perhaps wouldn't see in a normal lesson'*. One teacher in a West Midlands secondary school linked this to voice, commenting that observing the different relationship creative practitioners developed with students, and the 'great work' that resulted, had enabled staff *'to identify the importance of students as our learning partners'*. Another suggested that Creative Partnerships work had helped staff bring more egalitarian relationships into the classroom and to change the ethos of the school as a whole:

Now the children are with us as well, it's not just how we are as a staff, but how the children can talk to us. We're not these distant figures that they don't see, they know a lot about us. We're not strangers to them, just constantly giving out instructions.

(Y5 teacher, Red Primary, 2008)

Young people also suggested that they wanted to know their teachers better and enjoyed moments where teachers shared personal aspects of their own lives with them. (The Kids' Creative's interview questions to creative practitioners in cameo 4.1.1a show how important such 'personal' knowledge is for students.) They argued that this was easier in spaces outside curriculum pressures, for example in after-school, or lunch-time clubs, at conferences or on trips - many of which Creative Partnerships also support. A Y6 girl at Red Primary described this as teachers chatting *'as if they're not at school'*. Such formulations suggest that breaking down traditional barriers to communication between students and teachers may be harder in central curriculum work. It also raises the question of how far the success of some Creative Partnerships projects derives from the opportunity they provide for adults and small groups of young people to work closely together in relatively open-ended and egalitarian ways, rather than from their substance and content.

Another example of how communication barriers can be surmounted comes from the conference on 'Education in 2025' (see Cameo 4.1.2a). The Youth Board organising it said that they aimed to create *'an event for young people, by young people'*. From our observations, it was clear that they had indeed successfully designed an innovative space marked as youth 'territory'. Teachers were positioned as conference goers rather than as authority figures, and engaged in more informal dialogues with their students than might be the case within school spaces. In workshops we saw teachers working collaboratively with young people to build models of 'future schools', design new uniforms, and develop ideas for new curriculums; they seemed comfortable with young people leading discussions and

with sharing conversations about each others' everyday lives over lunch and in breaks.

One strand of Creative Partnerships' work in school involves projects designed to offer a 'fresh start' for marginal – or simply 'invisible' - groups of young people, to re-engage them with school and learning through creative practices. Sometimes these take place outside, or in neutral spaces within schools. The stress placed on such work varied. On the one hand, NFER research¹³ has identified a slight bias in Creative Partnerships work overall towards higher achieving students. By contrast, one Creative Partnerships Regional Director who defined 'youth voice' as '*offering opportunities to young people that are different, outside the usual curriculum diet*' (by connecting them to the creative industries) suggested that such projects were a key component of Creative Partnerships provision in that area, and supplied a different meaning of 'voice' as offering personal, creative outlets and choices rather than the 'public' voice of governance. The cameo of Blue secondary school (4.1.1b), too, shows teachers' concern to draw in and 'turn around' students on the margins.

Similar motivations were common among teachers we interviewed, who took genuine pleasure in recounting stories of students who could not engage in lessons, but had been transformed by their involvement with Creative Partnerships, demonstrating focus, concentration and extensive literacy or other skills. Whilst it is problematic to attribute all change to a single cause, it does at least suggest that Creative Partnerships work can help young people develop new perspectives on their skills and capacities, change their identities as learners and how they think about themselves. In turn this may positively affect their relationships with adults. An important rider is that such work should have an audience that can bear witness to this change if it is to have a lasting impact. For example, a project that invited 'problem' Y5 children in a Midlands primary school to take on positive new identities as 'artists' and to run workshops for younger children may have been limited in its effect because teachers were not released from timetable to witness their success.

Despite evidence of improved intergenerational relationships, we also found some significant constraints and counter-examples related to peer relationships. As we have already noted, some governance projects created envy or new hierarchies within schools. In addition, when we talked to groups of students on their own, we found that even where they acknowledged getting on well with their teachers, they painted a picture of tensions within the student body as a whole. In one primary school, children (from lower ability groupings) described the relationship between ability groups as one of '*pure hate*' (Y4 boy, Red primary) – an experience of which their teachers seemed unaware. In other schools students seemed divided into antagonistic cultural groupings (often implicitly based on class).

In this context, youth voice projects that specifically require work with or across a whole year or even school may be particularly significant or beneficial. As one Creative Partnerships Regional Director [South East, 2008] explained:

¹³ See note 8.

Kids have their own tribal allegiances and so part of the training and development that you offer students is to cut through some of that, say well actually you do need to be going and talking to that group of students that you wouldn't normally talk to and what are you going to do with the information when you get it and how are you going to invite them... to talk to you and open up and be honest, when there are these sort of differences between you?

4.2.2 Affect and 'emotional' voice

By highlighting the importance of positive relationships, Creative Partnerships helps to draw attention to the affective dimensions of creative and participative work and the dynamics of the interpersonal– how the process 'feels', how it is embodied and experienced at a personal level, and how this is communicated and shared with others. Such factors may be crucial in developing successful participative practices and structures. Much of this work draws on humanistic approaches to education and pedagogy, where participants are encouraged to explore their own feelings and those of others through reflection in 'safe' environments¹⁴. Similarly, research on the conditions that foster effective creative collaboration has identified two critical factors that underpin creative work, sharing and trust. In particular, trust enables creative work by building comfortable social spaces that foster mutual understandings. It also moderates potential conflict and creates bridges between different perspectives¹⁵. The cameo, below, shows how such understandings and bridges are embedded within some Creative Partnerships youth voice work.

4.2.2a) Cameo: Pupil Voice resource

In 2007/8, one northern Creative Partnerships region funded the production of a 'pupil voice' resource, currently in use by creative practitioners across the region's school programme. It was written by a creative practitioner with a background in participatory theatre, working with a youth drama group of 18-25 year olds. He argued that, *'the fundamental first step in terms of introducing learner voice successfully is being able to get people talking to each other and to respect each others' needs'*.

The resource pack offers materials to support three stages of developing pupil voice. The first stage involves exercises that aim to 'challenge' teacher and pupil 'preconceptions' of each other, to reflect on their 'wants, needs, thoughts, motivations', to communicate, reflect on their own behaviour, feelings or responses, and to listen to and trust each other. The pack favours methods such as role play and simulations, followed by reflective plenaries, aiming to provide participants with a space to talk, initially in the context of an activity rather than about their own lives. Such activities, the creative practitioner argued, are the essential groundwork for subsequent pupil voice activities: *'in order to discuss what you want to do, you need to say why you*

¹⁴ Rogers, C. (1970) *Encounter groups*, London: The Penguin Press

¹⁵ Moran, S. & John-Steiner, V. (2004) How collaboration and creative work impacts identity and motivation. In D. Miell & K. Littleton (Eds.) *Collaborative Creativity: Contemporary Perspectives*, London: Free Association Books, pp11 – 25

want it, to consider how it's going to impact on you and also be aware how it might impact on others'. He viewed both adults and young people as lacking skills of communication and mutual respect:

Young people don't necessarily know, because they don't have the experience to know, how to express to an adult...and adults are less likely to listen because they're not used to ... listening to students on the same level

Through a programme of INSET with a small group of teachers the creative practitioner discovered that one of the major barriers to this kind of work was that:

Teachers feared that pupils would spoil the activity, they wouldn't stand in the room, they would mess about. Imagine you're an IT teacher - your experience is that if you let people stand up and move around the classroom you lose control.

However, he reported that when one of these teachers tried the methods advocated, she found:

It scared her, but she enjoyed it and thought it was valuable and she was surprised how much the children engaged with it and how much they got out of it. It was nice for her to have a lesson that full of discussion and debate rather than something that was about hammering in nails of knowledge and then saying we've done that for the GCSE or whatever.

[Interview 2008]

Similar understandings to those embedded in the Learner Voice resource appeared in accounts from some schools (in monitoring reports) of programmes promoting emotional literacy or SEAL. These were sometimes described as a contribution to youth voice, although they are far removed from the 'rights' discourse of other initiatives. 'Voice' here seemed to refer to an acquired capacity to express inner (but previously unrecognised) truths about the self. Without disputing the positive outcomes of specific projects, we should note that these approaches have been subject to some critique, particularly for their failure to engage with wider relations of power that structure individual relationships. For instance, diagnosing problems in child-adult relations as caused by a lack of authentic communication, or attributing child misbehaviour to a lack of 'self-esteem' or of emotional literacy, locates problems within individual psychology rather than looking at broader contexts. Some have also pointed to the narrowly instrumental purposes of 'emotional voice' practices in aiming to improve behaviour, make students 'better' and develop self-management skills more suited to service sector work than encouraging complex reflection and self-awareness¹⁶.

¹⁶ See for instance, Burman E. (2009) 'Beyond 'emotional literacy' in feminist and educational research', *British Educational Research Journal*, 35:1 137 – 155, and Ecclestone, K. and Hayes, D.,

In the cameo below we describe how one project brought together different kinds of 'voice' in uneasy combination, demonstrating some limits to both.

4.2.2b) Cameo: Dance and Drama Engagement project, London

In 2008 young Londoners seen as 'at risk of exclusion' were selected to take part in an engagement project, attending a dance and drama programme one day a week for eight weeks. Creative Partnerships encouraged the local education authority to include a 'youth voice' element in it, so the young people were also asked for their opinions about the authority's 14-19 curriculum reforms, and carried out some initial consultation by interviewing other students.

The group consisted of four African Caribbean young women and two Turkish young men from local secondary schools and an African Caribbean young man and young woman from a special school. The dance and drama practitioners on this project were experienced in working with 'engagement' groups and committed to developing strong, egalitarian relationships with students. They did this through a variety of humanistic and 'creative' techniques, including negotiating contracts, drawing on their own vulnerabilities and asking (not answering) questions in order to encourage young people to come to their own conclusions, using role play and modeling possibilities.

The students were surprised by how creative practitioners treated them, leading one to comment incredulously *'it's like you genuinely care about us'*. In this way a 'safe' space was created, which foregrounded reciprocal relationships of trust - *'you take them to vulnerable places so they have to trust you'*. Young people were encouraged to use this space to reflect on their experiences of school and their wider lives. This involved *'a moment of escapism from whoever they were'* and an opportunity to *'do something different and be whoever they wanted to be'*, according to the creative practitioner. The creative practitioners deliberately did not ask anything about the young people at the outset so that young people could leave their school-based identities behind them.

Young people experimented in roles of peer teachers, as leaders and as interviewers. They were encouraged to talk about their experiences of school, to reflect critically on their own behaviour and to understand that of others (including of teachers and peers). The project ended with a performance and discussion with an audience of parents, teachers and some policy makers.

In terms of the relationships and the new identities young people developed in the context of the project, it was successful. All students completed it and a majority returned to education afterwards. However, there were some limitations to it. Creative practitioners were not able to work alongside

teachers, information about the project or students' views on their school was not fed back to teachers, and because it took place outside school structures and procedures, problems arose for students in sustaining their participation and new identities. One teacher was reported to have asked a student *'so / really don't understand the point, what is this programme that you are doing?'*. This was disheartening for the young people involved.

Finally, Creative Partnerships found that it was hard to interest the local authority in the youth voice element that involved commenting on its 14-19 reforms, due to the lack of an agreed strategy for making use of the feedback and the time constraints on local authority decision-making processes.

Whilst any method is unlikely to succeed without good project management, including a communication strategy to which all stakeholders agree and keep throughout the life of the project, this example may also indicate that some aspects of power relations and contexts cannot be addressed through humanistic methods alone.

4.2.3 Reflections

- Our research provides ample evidence that Creative Partnerships projects can improve intergenerational relationships, at individual level and indeed in the classroom or even the whole school. This is true of work in a range of contexts and with a range of students, including marginal or 'disaffected' young people who can benefit from opportunities to experiment with new roles and identities.
- A focus on relationships helps to draw attention to the affective dimensions of creative and participative work – how the process 'feels', how it is embodied and experienced at a personal level, and how this is communicated and shared with others. Such factors may be crucial in developing successful participative practices and structures.
- The benefits of such work are however limited where programmes are outside or independent of the usual practices and structures of schools, where teachers are involved at only a superficial level or not at all, where others are not 'witnesses' to change and where usual school contexts do not support new identities and relationships, unless opportunities for integration and dialogue are planned for and conscientiously maintained.
- Antagonisms arising from educational practices (such as ability setting) and youth cultural affiliations were reported as powerful, negative, factors in young people's school experiences. Consideration of relationships in 'voice' work should include peer relationships as well as youth-adult.

4.2.4 Recommendations

- Improved relationships are increasingly recognised as an important criterion of success, both in creative and specific 'voice' work. Projects and evaluations

should, however, take care to consider relationship building between young people and teachers (not just creative practitioners), as well as peer relationship building. They should also consider how better relationships might be sustained in the long-term after a particular project has finished. Such issues require close attention to integrating work with school structures and staff, and to strategies for communication and dialogue.

- Schools should consider how their cultures and practices promote or limit an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect between teachers and pupils as well as between different groups of young people. Youth voice initiatives are likely to be perceived as tokenistic by both staff and young people in the absence of such an atmosphere.

4.3 Young people as co-producers of learning

The third element of youth voice we will consider here focuses on student participation in processes of learning and curriculum. This element relates to Creative Partnerships' core work in schools and involves creative practitioners working alongside teachers to transform and challenge existing classroom learning and teaching¹⁷.

Schools that aspire to become Creative Partnerships schools are required to adopt practices based on the philosophy that young people should be seen as co-producers or co-constructors of learning. In initial interviews to become Change schools or Schools of Creativity schools are graded on '*a genuine valuing of pupil voice and a commitment to working with pupils as co-producers of learning*'. In application forms schools are asked to comment on how they will ensure pupils are involved in '*planning and personalising learning*'. In evaluating projects, schools are asked to reflect on how young people were involved in '*identifying learning needs, shaping the direction and content of the project and evaluating its outcomes on an appropriate basis alongside adults*'. Creative Partnerships documentation identifies a role for teachers and creative practitioners in '*enabling young people to initiate, run and evaluate creative teaching and learning activities*'. The Creative School Development Framework recognises teacher's professional development and encourages collaboration and joint authorship, both with creative practitioners and with colleagues within the school.

The language that is used to describe such 'co-production' is flexible and sufficiently ambiguous to be interpreted in different ways by Creative Partnerships regional offices and schools. So, for instance, the emphasis on including young people in planning and evaluating could result in the kinds of 'governance' projects discussed above. It could be taken as referring to the personalisation agenda, and thus require students to be offered choices, a varied curriculum and the chance to express preferences (though not necessarily to make decisions) about curriculum *delivery*, or curriculum *content*. It could involve individualistic practices such as students

¹⁷ Jones, K. and Thomson, P. (2008) Policy rhetoric and the renovation of English schooling: the case of Creative Partnerships, *Journal of Education Policy*, 23:6, pp. 715 - 727

evaluating their own learning through reflective diaries, or acquiring new vocabularies with which to talk about learning, again without necessarily changing what is taught. For some, particularly teachers, such co-production could be seen as a 'return' to old (1970/80s) ways of working, involving project or topic-based work taught through progressive, student-centred methods that encourage students to follow their own interests and involve problem-solving and collaborative work. Such approaches would also be familiar to creative practitioners with backgrounds in the humanistic or progressivist methods of community arts. So for example teachers in one school commented:

[This is] back to my training days, just the notion of being able to do something creatively with a bit of freedom' (Y2 teacher, Green primary)
This is taking schools back to what it used to be ... It's what I would call the good old topic work, you've got ownership over it, you can go off on tangents' (Deputy head, Green primary).

Finally, co-production could allow relationships to remain relatively static - '*at the end of the day, teachers are there to teach and students are there to learn*', as a Creative Partnerships Programme Manager (North, 2008) commented, or, it could herald more fundamental shifts in identities and practices, as described by this Midlands Regional Director in 2008:

It's about being brave enough to say to kids, "in terms of the curriculum we've still got our English, maths and science ... and history but we still tend to be working on our own and we are not using each other as resource enough and maybe lessons aren't exciting for everybody and I wonder if we could get our heads together and think of something that would cover all that content area, commit to changing the way in which we learn and really grow that. And I have an idea that if we were to do something about growing an outside garden which could help us look at some of the science of that, measuring things out, talking about the processes, then that might be a way forward and I wonder if anybody's got any ideas about how we can bring that together?" And it's a brave teacher to do that. But the level of commitment and engagement you get from kids in positioning them that way and giving them the creative partner resources that enable them to make real the idea that they've got in their head, it seems to reap benefits but it takes a mindset, it takes a commitment, it takes more time and they are all things that aren't always easily at hand.

This idea, the Creative Partnerships RD went on to comment, can extend to '*adults having the responsibility to observe and take the lead from young people*' rather than the other way around – as happens, for instance, in the Reggio Emilia approach¹⁸. The fact that Creative Partnerships staff and creative practitioners or agents that we interviewed in many regions expressed interest in the ideas of

¹⁸ See for instance Gandini, L., Hill, L., Cadwell, L. & Schwall, C., eds (2005) *In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia*. New York: Teachers College Press or Rinaldi, C. (2005) *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, Researching and Learning*. London: Routledge.

Reggio Emilia, and that Creative Partnerships had funded professional development visits there, suggests that this radical rethinking of classroom relations was a significant source of inspiration in Creative Partnerships.

This range of possible interpretations of 'students as co-producers of learning' allowed local forms of ownership and diverse practices. The interviews and observations that we carried out suggested that most schools implicitly aligned co-production with their existing philosophies and commitments, with Creative Partnerships enriching and developing practices rather than inducing radically new ones. As we suggested earlier, such openness to bottom-up change and local interpretations of Creative Partnerships policy may be a factor in Creative Partnerships' success.

We found, however, that 'youth voice' in more radical versions of co-production was more accurately described in terms of process rather than product. Indeed, several Creative Partnerships staff suggested that the more 'youth voice' - in the sense of collaborative, mutual approaches - was integrated into a school's practices or ways of working, the harder it was to isolate and identify. Yet our research was, perhaps inevitably, directed towards interrogating more clearly demarcated practices and projects. Moreover, some schools insisted that particular 'voice' projects were only a starting point for what they hoped would develop into whole school change towards a more creative curriculum. The time frame of our research makes it difficult to know how far this claim would be substantiated. It is likely that understanding substantial shifts in how pedagogy is conceived requires an in-depth examination over a longer time frame of the complex and sometimes invisible processes of change in school culture. These questions are more effectively dealt with in Creative Partnerships' research project on creative school change¹⁹. Nevertheless, we indicate here some aspects of 'co-production' that emerged from our research, without claiming to have explored all of its many possible dimensions.

4.3.1 Central and peripheral co-producer models: findings from School of Creativity applications

Our analysis of schools' applications to become Schools of Creativity (all those from the 30 schools that were successful and 12 that were not), suggested a distinction between schools that positioned pupil voice as playing a role in core aspects of school life and those that accorded it a role in more peripheral aspects. These core aspects might include: strategic planning (development frameworks and plans, governors' boards), school structures (timetable, staffing, etc), pedagogy (teaching, learning, assessment etc), and cross-school, curriculum-based initiatives such as Citizenship and SEAL. Less central aspects might include ongoing but non-core practices such as anti-bullying initiatives, peer mentoring, mediating, buddying, one-off finite events such as trips and projects, and extra-curricular activities such as after-school clubs.

Applications that built pupil involvement into the central strategic, structural and pedagogic aspects of school life were successful (this was true of 29 out of the 30).

¹⁹ See www.creativeschoolchange.org.uk

The assessors of the applications often noted this favourably. It was notable that successful schools placed less emphasis on pupil voice in peripheral aspects of school life, whilst unsuccessful schools tended to place more emphasis on this – perhaps thereby revealing a lack of genuine commitment to pupil involvement in more central aspects of policy and practice. It is clear that, in the eyes of the assessors, applications that put more emphasis on pupil involvement at peripheral levels were not judged as having the potential to contribute to the sustained and embedded approach Creative Partnerships seeks. It is likely that as their work develops, Schools of Creativity will provide test beds that can offer greater insights into how schools manage the processes needed to involve students as co-producers of learning at a central level.

4.3.2 'School Environment' projects and co-production

Our analysis of Creative Partnerships Monitoring Reports revealed that one popular type of project through which schools demonstrated their commitment to youth voice was to involve pupils in making decisions about the school environment – often meaning, in practice, the redesign of playgrounds, but sometimes also redesigning particular areas of a school building or discussing design in general. Schools' accounts of this process inadvertently revealed whether this commitment was central or peripheral. For example, a school where the School Council '*decided the layout of playground markings*', could be seen to afford only a restricted role for students. However, in many cases, schools involved students in creative and substantial ways – for example, giving students control over a budget, giving each class or year responsibility for part of the grounds, encouraging students to carry out consultation, to research games, equipment and activities, involving them in planning and fundraising, establishing playground committees, buddy schemes, and so on. Most importantly in relation to students as 'co-producers', some schools also used the work and the presence of a creative practitioner (often architects, landscapers or sculptors) to discuss situated aspects of creative learning and teaching – where and how it happens and what young people's contribution to it should be – and to design responses to these questions in the form of structures, nature trails, multi-sensory installations and alternative spaces where creative learning and teaching could take place. In one East Midlands secondary school, students' imaginative designs for a new extension provided (successful) campaigning material when the school was threatened with closure.

On the face of it, the Building Schools for the Future programme should have provided rich opportunities for students to debate the purposes, past and future, of education, and contribute their own insights to the design process. One recent Creative Partnerships publication discusses how three London schools worked creatively in response to BSF²⁰. Our own research revealed, however, that for many schools and Creative Partnerships regions this potential proved difficult to realise due to a combination of external factors beyond their control (developers' reluctance

²⁰ Deveson, T. (2008) *Engaging Students in School Design and Rebuild Projects*. Creative Partnerships London East and South Case Studies. Downloaded on 7/8/09 from www.creative-partnerships.com/area-delivery-organisations/anewdirection/research/engaging-students-in-school-design-and-rebuild-projects-102.pdf

to engage with or unfamiliarity with youth consultation processes, lack of support from local authorities, competing political agendas and priorities, incompatible timescales and so on). This indicates that although a commitment to youth consultation and participation has been enshrined in central Governmental legislation²¹ there is still considerable work to be done to ensure that this commitment is instantiated at local authority level. Until this is realised, Creative Partnerships regional attempts to promote youth voice through engagement with projects such as Building Schools for the Future is likely to be compromised.

4.3.3 Young researcher models and co-production

Creative Partnerships monitoring reports and our direct research showed that many schools set up 'student researcher' teams to move on from the concerns of School Councils (often characterised as 'uniforms and toilets'), to engage students in key debates about creativity, the curriculum and creative learning and teaching. Student research has been advocated for some time, so this approach is relatively familiar²². Sometimes these initiatives were offshoots of or new roles for School Councils or Creative Councils, at other times they were independent of them. Students received varying amounts of training to help them in their research, from intensive, continued support from professional researchers, to occasional or even one-off workshops. In some instances, student researchers' main role was to evaluate specific Creative Partnerships projects, in others their remit was broader. For instance, one secondary school in the North Midlands asked a team of students to work together with staff and a social researcher to '*gain a common language and understanding of what creativity looks like in the curriculum*'. In another South East secondary school, where a head teacher had recognised some resistance from staff to creative, youth-centred methods, students were trained to research '*creative processes, creative moments and creative triggers*' in classrooms, starting by looking at their own responses, then the responses of their peers and then looking more objectively at lessons where teachers had volunteered to be observed. Here the focus of the research was always on looking for '*the positive moments in a lesson when people felt that they can be creative*' (Regional Director, South East, 2008). In many cases students then shared their findings with staff at a staff meeting or INSET. In best practice, students were kept informed about what had happened to their ideas and findings. The next cameo offers further examples of the kinds of roles and activities undertaken by students.

4.3.3a) Cameo: 'Get In!' student documenters project, North Midlands

²¹ See for example DfES (2004) *Working Together: Giving Children and Young People a Say*, London, Department for Education and Skills, and DCSF (2008) *Working Together: Listening to the Voices of Children and Young People* [online]. Available from: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications> (accessed 02-09-2009)

²² See Fielding, M., and Bragg, S. (2003) *Students as Researchers: making a difference*, Cambridge: Pearson's Publishing; Kirby, P. (1999) *Involving Young Researchers: how to enable young people to design and conduct research*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Steinberg, S., and Kincheloe, J., eds (1998) *Students as researchers: creating classrooms that matter*, London: Falmer; Kellett, M. (2005) *How to Develop Children as Researchers: A Step by Step Guide to Teaching the Research Process*, London: Paul Chapman

In one North Midlands region, listed as the 20th most deprived out of 354 districts in England (indices of deprivation, 2007) Creative Partnerships appointed an arts organisation to lead a cross-secondary school 'student documenters' project called 'Get In!'. Students filled in an application form, were short-listed by teachers working alongside creative practitioners, then took part in a day-long workshop from which final numbers were chosen. A variety of creative practitioners, including filmmakers, social researchers and architects delivered workshops to develop students' skills. Work then evolved differently in each school. In one, a student researcher group worked with a teacher and a creative practitioner to assess the implementation of a new curriculum in years 7 and 8 within the school. The young people conducted their own survey, writing and administering a questionnaire, interviewing some of the students in year 7, and reporting their findings at a senior management meeting. Another team documented their school closure, looking at the history of the school and some of the emotional and social responses to its closure. Another group documented and evaluated an 'alternative curriculum' day. In some cases there was a lack of understanding of the amount of support young people might require to produce 'useful' resources for a school of which they could be proud. For instance it was assumed that a three-hour session with a film maker would enable young people to put together a coherent piece of video, or that a session with a social researcher on writing a questionnaire would allow them to construct and administer a survey of all students in the school. However, a range of artefacts were produced from this project overall, including videos, student questionnaires, and powerpoint presentations.

It could be argued that research skills are important generic learning skills that all students should acquire – although in practice we found that there was a tendency for these research projects to involve only a few students, for example as extension activities for Gifted and Talented students. These projects thus raise similar issues about inclusion and how other students perceive them as the issues we identified earlier in relation to governance groups, (see section 4.1, above).

The foregrounding of creative approaches by Creative Partnerships has helped some of these research projects to move away from traditional, academic ways of collecting and presenting data – going beyond questionnaires and surveys for example, to using participatory video, drama, role-play and student radio or podcasts to research and present student perspectives. This may also have increased their appeal and enabled a wider range of students to participate.

A key issue is how such research is used in relation to staff. Our interviews revealed that in some instances the research process seemed to have been mishandled (for example students were perceived as 'spying' on teachers) and key findings were appropriated and presented to staff by senior managers without the possibility of discussion or comeback, in an attempt to 'shame' teachers into change. Where it was well managed, however, the process showed that - as other research has found²³ -

²³ See for example the evidence collected by the Open University's Children's Research Centre -

with adequate support young people even at primary level can become capable researchers and co-producers of knowledge, whose commitment and insights surprise and impress adults. Its considerate rather than judgemental approaches, inspired teachers to see their students' experience differently, to develop different classroom practices (such as the more routine use of students as classroom observers) and to engage in genuine dialogues with students as more equal partners in learning. As one Merseyside secondary school assistant headteacher commented:

It made me question how we use pupil voice. We need to use it for deeper things, e.g. to inform the curriculum and teaching and learning. They are there to learn, so they should be consulted on learning. We shouldn't just consult them about uniform or behaviour or only through the student council, which always involves the same students.

[Magenta Secondary, 2007].

4.3.4 Student-centred creative learning.

During the course of conducting the interviews for this project, many teachers told us that they valued the opportunities Creative Partnerships offered to work in genuine partnership with students as well as with creative practitioners. The cameo below exemplifies the kind of processes that might be involved in a 'co-produced' creative approach, although we believe it to be rare.

4.3.4a) Cameo: child-centred 'critical' learning, Green Primary, Midlands

Green primary school is a multicultural primary school, in which over 20 languages are spoken, situated under a flyover near the centre of a Midlands town. It has a strong sense of social responsibility. In 2008, a creative practitioner worked with the Year 1 and 2 teachers and classes on a term's work, core to the teachers' curriculum planning, around global citizenship. She was an artist educator experienced in collaborating with schools and community groups, and with a longstanding interest in the Reggio Emilia approach. Her beliefs about education chimed with those of the teachers who adopted '*holistic, child-centred approaches*' to learning.

Despite the same starting point - a pile of rubbish on the hall floor, brought in from home by the children - the work developed very differently with each class. Year 1 did junk modeling, for example, while Year 2 children focused on environmental issues. The adults we interviewed talked about a '*three-way partnership: not the teacher and the artist sitting down to discuss what they would do but the children reflecting and talking about what they wanted to do next too*'. 'Planning meetings' took place at the beginning of every weekly session with the creative practitioner, during which time the children were encouraged to talk about and reflect on what they had done the previous week. '*We sometimes spent half a session doing that but the stuff we were getting from the children was so rich, and then you can plan something in genuine response to that*' (creative practitioner). Both the creative practitioner and the teacher felt that '*everybody had an equal voice in that*' and put this

down to a *'willingness to listen to each other'*. Learning was collaborative, pursuing children's own interests and concerns, rather than individualistic and competitive. The creative practitioner and teachers used the analogy of *'going on a journey'* with the children, where they were curious about *'where the children will go'*. The unpredictable nature of the work was challenging, raising issues about time, planning and trust. Nonetheless, the nurturing environment enabled risk-taking, where this seemed appropriate and supported children's concerns and capacity for social action – so for instance, teachers showed and discussed potentially upsetting footage about the impact of plastic bags on wildlife. The creative practitioner believed the school enabled such risk-taking because *'there was no desire or impetus to tightly control outcomes,'* which she compared to other schools where *'staff feel very driven that they have to have a product'*.

Towards the end of this work, the school arranged a gathering in a nearby park of children from various Creative Partnerships schools, with whom they were to share their work. The children decided to 'protest' about the environmental impact of plastic bags and designed their own artifacts such as placards, banners and eco-bags. Walking through the streets on the way to the event, the children spontaneously and enthusiastically invented their own chants and songs. In this way, the work was not only child-centred, but developed a critical, questioning edge, helping children develop higher order (or critical) thinking skills in relation to the global world around them. Teachers and creative practitioners were committed to broadening the children's horizons, encouraging them to think and ask questions about taken for granted assumptions in the world, whilst remaining open to learning themselves from the children.

As this cameo suggests, student-centred work of this kind involves a genuine curiosity on the part of teachers about their students' worlds and a desire to connect work in schools to students' outside lives, interests and youth or popular cultural practices. We would suggest that this also depends upon a faith in the existence and worth of students' prior cultural capabilities and competences. (In Section 7, we note that this faith was not always in evidence.) However, making students' cultures, experiences and identities central in this way may be problematic within existing curricula, particularly in secondary school. Such approaches may be easier to pursue through project-based, extra-curricular work, as in the cameo below.

4.3.4b) Cameo: 'Talkback' - student-led creativity and new relationships, Midlands

One Creative Partnerships region established 'Talkback', a social media project in an isolated, deprived, 1980s housing estate with a mainly white population on the outskirts of a large Midlands city. It created a website using podcasting and blogging, which it hoped would ultimately become a forum for use by all the local schools, and even local community organisations. Students from local primary and secondary schools were trained in aspects of podcast production, audio editing software and website maintenance. One of

the creative practitioners involved was particularly committed to 'political' or civic uses of media. He encouraged students to reflect critically on their own experience and lives and create '*new stories about the area*'. Students explored issues such as gang culture, local histories and relationships with police, through both drama and documentary.

The young people wanted to continue this work as the project funding finished, which required getting teachers involved in it. Teachers were asked to come and 'pitch' to the practitioners and students about what they thought the social media group should do next. This was a very positive experience that helped the staff to focus on what they might want, and what kind of support they might need to achieve this. The practitioners then created a learning group that included both teachers and students. There were 'status' issues here in that some teachers were uncomfortable about knowing less than students, and wanted their own training to take place before they began to work with the young people. The creative practitioners found that it was easier to break down potential power barriers and insecurities between teachers and young people outside of curriculum time. Nonetheless, the project began to develop a space where it was possible to transcend the traditional teacher/learner relationship - '*a space where it was OK for the teachers to ask the young people and for the young people to ask the teachers*' [creative practitioner].

This example shows in part how technology provides one means through which traditional power relationships might be challenged, allowing young people to take on roles as peer teachers, or as 'experts' in relation to teachers. The Blue Secondary School radio station (Cameo 4.1.b) similarly developed a sense of ownership and control, one young woman explaining '*it belongs to the students because we're the teachers, and we're teaching the teachers in school*'. Nonetheless, there are difficulties in sustaining such extra-curricular initiatives over the long term – and indeed 'Talkback' eventually folded.

4.3.5 Developing peer relationships in co-production

We have noted that many of the 'voice' projects we have discussed so far deal primarily with small groups of students, and may overlook young people's peer relationships in school. Arguably, if students are to become co-producers of learning within core curriculum activities, attention needs to be paid to all students in a classroom, to their relationships with each other as well as with their teachers. The cameo below suggests some dimensions of this work.

4.3.5a) Cameo: co-production and classroom ethos, Yellow Primary, Midlands

Yellow community primary school is situated in a multicultural community in a Midlands town. The area is one of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the town (2007 index of deprivation) and approximately 49% of the district's population is from minority ethnic communities. The area is characterised by high crime rates, high unemployment and low educational attainment. The

number of resident pupils attaining 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE in 2007 was 86 out of 221.

In 2006 the regional Creative Partnerships office provided CPD (inspired by Reggio Emilia) that encouraged the Creative Partnerships coordinator to examine questions of language and learning environment in her Y5 class. She replaced her existing classroom displays with less 'busy' ones that connected young people's own languages to those of Creative Partnerships' creativity framework so that they could *'own and possess their learning more'*. She changed the displays regularly to show students' ongoing work and included questions and 'surprises' in them, such as 'upside-down writing' that children said encouraged them *'to think differently'*. She structured lessons to engage the children in cycles of debating and sharing their views together.

One of her key moves was to abolish ability groupings. One girl explained to us that when they were asked *'What do you want to do, or how do you think we should do it?'*, their teacher encouraged them to feel confident about expressing themselves, whatever their ability, without feeling that there were right or wrong answers. The young people argued that being included in decision-making within their classroom and within the school supported the development of their creativity. They reported that equality in relationships in the class was important and that learning in mixed ability groups, which they had not done previously at the school, helped them to learn about other people, about themselves and about managing relationships. Through this they felt that they became more confident and *'built channels of respect'* within their class. They described the ideal relationship between a teacher and a child as being one where *'the teacher can sometimes be the child and the child can be the teacher'*.

The Creative Partnerships co-ordinator taught the same class for two years, which allowed the children to develop a language for talking about creativity and pupil voice that adults began to listen to and respect. They were thus central to the school beginning to develop a cross-curricular skills approach to learning.

As this cameo suggests, the task of developing strong collaborative, respectful peer cultures in a school is both challenging and a long-term one, but it may have a key contribution to make to creative learning – not only in terms of children's own learning, but also teachers' readiness to change their own practice. Perhaps the most powerful question the cameo raises, however, is whether creative learning and teaching are compatible with practices of differentiation on the grounds of 'ability'.

The vignette below is drawn from field notes of a visit to Green primary school (see cameo 4.3.4a) and concerns an 'ordinary' class where no creative practitioner was present, led by a teacher with a longstanding commitment to creative and egalitarian values. It portrays the deliberate and ongoing work required to foster collective practices and approaches amongst children.

4.3.5b) Vignette: relationship work in a Year 2 classroom, Green primary

The class is working on making burglar alarms and front door bells for 'Stan the man's house' (the dolls house in the corner of the classroom). They've been doing this in mixed ability groups before break and are now ready to show me what they've done. The teacher, John, has chosen one group to 'present' their work to me and asks the class if they know why he has chosen that group. One of the children in the chosen group puts up his hand to suggest that it might be because, 'we had a bit of trouble, we weren't sharing.' John asks the boy what the group did to solve that, and they explain that they made sure that all the children in the group had a go. John reiterates that he's chosen this group not because of what they've done but how they've done it and how they've listened to each other. He then explains to the class and to the group that he's going to be very interested in how the group decides to show their alarm. He suggests the group go out of the classroom to discuss how they're going to do this and whilst they are gone he asks the rest of the class: What would you do? How would you handle it? What would be your advice to them?

The children have lots of ideas and then the group comes back in. They are all holding a part of the alarm and talk about what they did using 'We' rather than 'I'.

[Field Notes, Dec 2008]

A rather different example of how creative practices can create a 'buzz' amongst a wider school community comes from the 'Talkback' project above, cameo 4.3.4b. Young people wrote and performed a radio drama, including a rap, of which they were very proud. This was played in a whole school assembly, and afterwards the rap was swiftly blue-toothed around to the mobile phones of many of the students in the school. Here, not only was creativity inserted into young people's everyday cultural/technological practices, but it was able to find an audience, spontaneously generating peer interaction and approval.

4.3.6 'Teacher voice' in co-production

We would argue that the extent to which students can become 'co-partners' in learning, learn from and teach each other, or teachers position themselves as learning from young people, depends on broader questions of school ethos and mechanisms for whole school change. Teachers (both in our and other research) have expressed feeling disempowered through top-down models of curriculum change, and even by youth voice if it was perceived as encouraging criticism and negativity about teachers. Our research participants frequently argued that 'teacher voice' – in the sense of respecting teachers, involving them in the dialogue, and trusting their professional skills so that they could bring about shifts in educational practice themselves - is as important as 'youth voice'. The long-term relationships Creative Partnerships enables teachers to build with creative practitioners, the collaboration it encourages within the school and the time it allows for reflection, evaluation and adaptation, can give teachers 'permission' to experiment with different ways of working, often involving more student-centred approaches.

In Yellow primary school (see cameo 4.3.5a above), the Creative Partnerships coordinator argued that the changes she introduced *'couldn't have happened without Creative Partnerships'*, partly because it provided *'opportunities for analysing, reflecting on, and evaluating the programmes'*. After two years, in 2008, the school was facing the challenge of embedding such practices more widely. The head teacher admitted feeling *'a bit outside my comfort zone'* because of the difficulties in balancing this kind of curriculum change with the other demands made on schools such as ever-changing education agendas, governmental organisations' continued reliance on *'basic stark data'* and resistance from some staff.

For her Creative Partnerships was useful in providing ideas and a framework for change, based around creativity, that they adapted for use in their school. This framework places *'listening to what the children say and how they feel about their learning'* at the heart of curriculum change, whilst understanding that, *'it's not just about the children because if the teacher's not happy and excited about what they're doing then they're not going to make much of an impact on the children'*. The vignette below captures a point in another school's development towards a more creative curriculum, led by a head who had emphasised reflective practice and teamwork between staff.

4.3.6a) Vignette: teachers' planning meeting, Red primary

The Y3 and 4 teachers are planning their lessons for next week. They do this every Thursday, they explain, because although it takes a couple of hours after school, it means they share ideas and don't have to worry so much about work over the weekend. The teachers – all women - drink tea and pass round sweets as they work, there is banter and laughter amidst serious focus. They are planning work on the news and decide that the students could become reporters on something that happens around school – they spend some time imagining what this could be, eventually coming up with four 'events', such as: one teacher has won the lottery, another has won an award from the Queen for being an eco-warrior... The teachers will come dressed appropriately and the children will move between classrooms to interview them.

There is no creative practitioner present; for the teachers this meeting is now a regular, unexceptional event. Yet I am struck by the creativity of the exchanges, how the plans evolve collectively, sparking from one idea to the next, and how they support the less experienced or confident teachers. The proposed lesson plans may not be led by the children, but they are interactive and do construct a context in which the children can take the work in unexpected directions. This format seems to echo (as the teachers later confirm) a previous, more elaborate Creative Partnerships project at the school, where a 'spaceship' landed in the playground and for a week the children worked with their teachers and artists to ask and answer their own questions about it. So this might be Creative Partnerships' legacy; not a tidied-up and finished project to look back on, but a diffused approach, a way of

working that is curious about what children will do within a framework teachers have supplied, a pleasure in collegiality, a casual creativity all the more remarkable for being taken for granted...

[Field notes March 2008]

The head of this school was still working towards change and described her next challenge as how to position children as 'leaders' of learning. Despite positive teacher-child relationships and the active learning methods used, this was also the school where some children described the relationship between ability groupings as one of '*pure hate*'. This suggests that there may be crucial aspects of experience that 'student voice' is best placed to reveal. However, different schools may need to approach these at their own pace, as in this case where developing teachers' collegiality and practice was seen as a key first step.

In discussing youth voice, many creative practitioners and Creative Partnerships staff referred to teachers' 'fear' of change. Whilst we would resist spurious psychological interpretations of individual teachers, there may be many material reasons why teachers could find a shift to a co-production model of working with students challenging, especially where it involves a radical rethinking of the curriculum and classroom relationships. These include, for instance, the nature of current teacher training, which, since the Educational Reform Act of 1988, has included very little on child development, social and emotional aspects of learning and teaching, or sociological accounts of child and youth cultures. Scant attention has been given to the history of educational ideas where matters of pedagogy have been debated in depth, and virtually none to alternative or radical traditions in education. Such absences may help account for the repeated claim that 'older' teachers, trained under a different regime, are much more comfortable with elements of a co-production model than their younger colleagues. Other reasons why this shift may be challenging may have to do with the pressurised context of performativity and marketisation, which tends to be risk-averse, and an absence of a wider school culture that is receptive to and supportive of change²⁴.

4.3.7 Reflections

- The notion of students as 'co-producers of learning' has been interpreted in many different ways by Creative Partnerships areas and schools. It can involve changes to peripheral aspects of school life, to significant but one-off initiatives, or to a rethinking of curriculum content and / or delivery, towards more student-centred and themed approaches, and greater partnership and dialogue. Our observations lead us to believe that the latter in particular can provide profound learning experiences for students and staff – although our main evidence here comes from primary schools, suggesting the greater challenges faced by secondary schools in this respect.

²⁴ For further discussion of these issues see Craft, A. and Jeffrey, R. (2008) Creativity and performativity in teaching and learning: tensions, dilemmas, constraints, accommodations and synthesis. *British Educational Research Journal*, 34(5), pp. 577–584

- We found many examples where Creative Partnerships has had a significant role in moving schools towards realising notions of co-production in distinct and creative ways. For instance, in projects to redesign school spaces, the involvement of professional expertise on the built environment is likely to have deepened reflection on its relation to learning. Successful student researcher teams offer interesting examples of consulting a wide range of students through creative methods. The long-term partnerships Creative Partnerships establishes between teachers and creative practitioners often model student-led and open-ended approaches that leave a legacy of positive 'dispositions' towards such ways of working. Where co-production requires respect for students' existing cultural worlds and experience, the evidence is a little more ambivalent as we discuss in section 7, but there are cases where Creative Partnerships has helped schools connect creatively with young people's lives beyond school.
- 'Teacher voice' - developing teachers' sense of professional competence, encouraging collaboration and reflective practice – was frequently reported as being as important as youth voice, particularly in enabling teachers to make profound (and potentially risky) changes to their pedagogy and relationships with students. Many other factors are involved here too, as discussed in more detail in the research on Creative Partnerships and Creative School Change²⁵.
- Whilst some interpretations of students as co-producers focus on individualised reflection on personal learning, those involving student collaboration require attention to peer relationships. A challenging question here is whether educational practices such as ability grouping, and the tensions they generate, militate against developing mutual, respectful, collective learning. Other practices that might promote or inhibit contexts conducive to learning are worth examining in more depth.

4.3.8 Recommendations

- As this research has revealed considerable diversity in the ways in which schools understand and express their '*commitment to working with pupils as co-producers of learning*', Creative Partnerships might want to generate debate and awareness about what creative pedagogies might look like and the role accorded to students within them. It is clear that the concept of 'co-production' embraces a complex and multifaceted set of practices. Further guidance is needed about the conditions and contexts that lead to successful integration of these practices if all Creative Partnerships schools are to embrace this commitment.
- Schools should interrogate how far their routine practices – such as differentiating between students in terms of ability - might prove an obstacle to more profound realisations of co-production models.

²⁵ See Thomson, P., Jones, K., Hall, C., (2009) *Creative School Change*. London: Creativity, Culture and Education and other documents on www.creativeschoolchange.org.uk

- Further research is needed to explore in greater detail what range of practices engage students as 'co-producers', especially in secondary schools. Creative Partnerships Schools of Creativity should have much to offer here as they are particularly committed to youth voice in central aspects of school life.

4.4 Further thoughts

Our analysis and findings in this section lead us to make a number of general observations relevant to how 'youth voice' is conceived.

- 1 We should move from a focus on 'youth voice' alone, to a broader exploration of adult-youth relations in participation, as others have also argued²⁶. This refers partly to how participation practices challenge assumptions of capacity based on age and thereby shift how adults and young people relate to one another. It would also involve attention to the role played both by individual adults and by mainstream cultures, practices and discourses in generating, directing, supporting and shaping expressions of 'voice'.
- 2 In addition to exploring youth-adult relationships, however, it is important to consider relations between and within groups of young people, and how participation practices affect them.
- 3 We also need to look beyond voice, to its contexts. So far we have pointed to the structuring contexts of the immediate interpersonal relations of classrooms and school cultures. In subsequent sections we expand this argument.

²⁶ Mannion, G. (2007) 'Going Spatial, Going Relational: Why "listening to children" and children's participation needs reframing.' *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 28 (3): 405-420

Section 5: Creativity and participation

In this section we discuss our second research question

RQB Creativity: is there a necessary relationship between the aspiration to develop creative learning projects and the aspiration to develop youth participation?

Unsurprisingly, answers to this question depend on what is meant by creative learning, by creativity, and by youth participation or voice. As Creative Partnerships' own review has shown²⁷, there are a number of 'rhetorics of creativity' mobilised in debates, which are not only different but sometimes contradictory. Here, we discuss some common themes or ways of thinking about creativity and participation, in order to clarify Creative Partnerships' interest in youth participation and why it has become so important to Creative Partnerships' work.

5.1 Is creativity inherently participative?

Many of the Creative Partnerships Regional Directors we interviewed believed that there was a necessary link between their work on creativity and youth voice, one going so far as to argue that *'everything we do is youth voice'* [Creative Partnerships RD, North East, 2007]. According to this view creativity is inherently a collective, collaborative activity which gives an equal voice to young people, because *'they are positioned to see themselves as innovative and having a value to give'* [Creative Partnerships RD, Midlands, 2008].

However, when this account of the relationship between creativity and participation is mobilised, it tends to refer to actual *processes* of creative production, during which young people are able to make decisions about what and how they were creating. As we have seen, schools' Creative Councils, or the region-wide Young Consultants initiative, were set up specifically to go beyond this and to allow young people to have a say in establishing the content, personnel and tone of creative programmes from the outset. Working to promote young people's participation at this stage of creative learning processes proved to be challenging for all adults involved if they wished to avoid developing initiatives where participation was little more than functional or tokenistic.

Another view expressed by Creative Partnerships Regional Directors and creative practitioners themselves, was that creative practitioners were inherently inclined towards participatory ways of working, particularly in comparison to teachers; that they could contribute new tools, resources and models that enable young people to participate more fully; and that they have a natural affinity with young people since both are able to 'play'. Whilst there is evidence of creative practitioners doing and being all these things, it might be better explained with reference to a range of specific factors. Some creative practitioners brought progressive/humanistic training and beliefs from their experience in community arts or theatre. Some would address

²⁷ Banaji, S. and Burn A. (2007) *Rhetorics of Creativity: a Review of the Literature*. London: Arts Council England.

students as equals, either on principle or because it was part of their working practice – one practitioner explained that she treated her student group as she would any other client to whom she was offering her creative services. They also often worked in advantageous contexts – with smaller groups than a normal class, in a different setting, on topics or using media and technologies that students were positively inclined towards. They also experienced less pressure to raise attainment and achieve prescribed outcomes. Beyond these kinds of explanations, it seems that adults in the creative sector could be as surprised as teachers by young people's capabilities, and that their approach to participation was just as variable.

5.2 Do creative practices allow a more authentic expression of young people's views and concerns?

It has been argued that creative approaches can overcome some students' alienation from the formal curriculum and thus generate inclusion: *'these broader modes of expression can foster engagement and commitment in young people who are disengaged from other forms of learning but find ways of developing autonomy and self-knowledge through participation in the arts'*²⁸. By the same token, some of our research participants proposed that creative approaches could enable more authentic forms of expression. Creative Partnerships was seen to offer a unique range of *'creative ways of engaging pupil voice that enable different types of young people to express their views in a meaningful way'* (Creative Partnerships Regional Director, North West).

Certainly many schools and practitioners were committed to moving beyond academic modes of expression in order to be more inclusive. One of the creative practitioners involved in the dance and drama engagement project (Cameo 4.2.1b) described their work:

We are having conversations but it is not about how articulate they are, it is about them voicing their opinions and their thoughts, using drama and dance work, there are moments where you can express yourself and it is not about the language that you use or how many syllables were in the words that you use.

There was considerable evidence of creative practitioners helping to devise imaginative methods to collect student perspectives and ideas – such as collaboratively making models of an 'ideal school', performance art, or young people conducting audio and video interviews to elicit opinions. Special Schools argued that working with creative practitioners enabled non-verbal students to express views and responses in new ways – which their teachers were particularly skilled at noting and interpreting. The resources and artifacts that creative practitioners bring into schools could also enable new kinds of communication and interaction between young people and adults. A media practitioner working on the social media project described in Section 4.3.4b argued that a microphone, for example, could support young people to *'behave in a much more confident way when they're dealing with an adult as it gets them asking questions that they would*

²⁸ Jeffrey, R. 2005: 2, cited in Banaji, S. and Burn A. (2007) *Rhetorics of Creativity: a Review of the Literature*. London: Arts Council England

normally think would be too cheeky or they're not allowed to, or outside the rules'. We have also suggested there was a different 'feel' to events young people organised, which did not have to conform to the norms of educational institutions. We believe that all these are very positive aspects of Creative Partnerships' approaches.

However, it would be simplistic to suggest that such methods and processes give access to previously undiscovered 'truths'. They themselves have conventions and rules that shape what can be articulated through them, and the extent to which they are able to elicit a wider range of views or include a wider range of students depends on other factors, such as the context in which they are introduced, the participants' and producers' sense of their purpose and audience, and the biases and perspectives of those interpreting the material. Something of this complexity is captured in the vignette below, a moment from the work described in cameo 4.1.3b:

5.2.a) Vignette – URB rap

*The students work solidly all morning rehearsing, helped by a teacher, their regular creative practitioner and a rap artist who has come for the day. Then they put on their URB-branded T-shirts and head for the conference. The presentation they give is confident, polished and multimedia. It includes a screening of their short video on regeneration, students reading their raps in pairs to music while Powerpoint images are projected behind them, and finishes with questions for the audience. Having listened to the words in rehearsal, I am aware that the rap lyrics not only summarise the students' extensive research on youth views of the community, but also display an insider's knowledge of the different areas of the town, their identities and rivalries. However, I wonder if this is hard to grasp on a first hearing. Afterwards, the audience ask more questions rather than answering the students' questions to them, requesting more straightforward narrative – about who they are, how the group came to be, etc. The adults on my table are slightly disapproving. One says 'white people shouldn't rap!' to nods from the other two. Warming to her theme, she adds 'why didn't they use images of shipbuilding – now **that** would have been about our town's culture'. Yet, one student had explained (in conversation with me and on the video they have just shown) that to most young people the shipyards are irrelevant, part of pre-history already.*

[Field Notes March 2008]

This vignette highlights contrasting views on what constitutes authentic, intelligible and appropriate 'voice'. Rap is often perceived as quintessential 'youth culture', although it was in fact the (white, woman) creative practitioner who had proposed using the rap format for the presentation. Nonetheless, the young people were familiar enough with it to work - with support - within its conventions for their own purposes, to express their views and their research creatively and multimodally. The audience member who suggests rap is inappropriate implies that cultural forms have ethnically-based specificity and ownership, but the different form of authenticity she is seeking, which she locates in the supposed traditions of the local

area, is one that has far less meaning for young people than rap. And meanwhile the contemporary local knowledge young people do have seems to be overlooked, as the audience did not, or were not able to, engage to any great extent with either the content or the form of their presentation.

As this example also suggests, how far creative methods can 'give' young people a voice depends on their audience and purpose. In cases where 'student voice' involved training students to create audio or video for 'public' airing on community radio, school websites, and so on, there might be some constraints on the kinds of topics covered or the views aired²⁹ and occasionally such voice seemed to be explicitly co-opted into schools' self-promotional strategies.

'Having a voice' is not the same as being heard, let alone engaging in dialogue, as a Creative Partnerships Regional Director in the West Midlands illustrated. He described a project that had worked successfully with 'underachieving' girls in a generally high-achieving secondary school. However, only one teacher turned up to view their exhibition, which he attributed to the school's reluctance to acknowledge that it might have to address the girls' negative experiences. It posed a painful dilemma:

Part of the reason these children were seen as underachievers was that nobody seemed to take any interest in them, and they've been shown a lot of interest now, and they've been nurtured and supported. Now what happens when we go? Is it worse that we've done this, or worse that we've not? ... You raise these issues and actually it means they [the school] have got to do something about it, they're just not prepared to go there. ... So sometimes you think, what's our responsibility in supporting young people to have a voice, and to say something about themselves, but at the same time the environment which they will go back into, isn't interested?

[Interview 2008]

One writer suggests that a failure to address the content of youth voice is a clear sign that it has only a decorative or symbolic rather than substantive function³⁰. Engaging in interpretation and dialogue, for instance about how 'voice' has been generated (the discourses on which young people draw) and how it might be responded to, could therefore be seen as according it respect. However, there are genuine difficulties in developing such dialogue, including adults' desire not to seem overly critical or undermining of young people's work. In some cases, students' creative expression could prove problematic even where audiences were in principle receptive to it. At a 2007 youth voice conference in the Midlands, students worked with creative practitioners to discuss questions from the local authority derived from its draft Schools Improvement Plan. They expressed their responses by drawing on large Perspex panels, which were then assembled in a striking display. Surveying

²⁹ See also Thomson, P., Hall, C. and Russell, L. (2006). "An arts project failed, censored or...? A critical incident approach to artist-school partnerships." *Changing English* 13 (1): 29-44.

³⁰ Hart, J. (2008) Children's Participation and International Development: Attending to the Political *International Journal of Children's Rights* 16 407-418

the results, the Creative Partnerships Regional Director commented '*what's noticeable is that words are missing... now it's up to us to interpret it*'. It was by no means clear how the local authority might use the images within such a formal process as development planning. Of course, this is also true of word-based consultations, where the views expressed are not couched in a readily comprehensible language.

Young people's expression of views can also meet with ambivalence or outright hostility. This can be seen in the newspaper coverage of the November 2008 launch event for the student-produced 'Manifesto for a Creative Britain' at Tate Modern, referred to in section 4.1.2. The *Times*' arts correspondent describes³¹ those present as exotic 'others', telling readers that 'All (sic) teenage life was there. There were goths, indie kids, baggy trousered hip hop fans, rabble rousers, class nerds, athletes and head boy and girl types'. A staged 'game show' was won, the writer claims, less because of the student's ideas than his 'two-tone blonde and black chin-length fringe with a crest like a peacock's tail'. Beyond this concern with hairstyles and appearance, the author is flippant about the substance of the manifesto; including some of its points, then adding dismissively 'they stopped short of asking for more holidays and less homework too'. London's *Evening Standard*³² produced a relatively straightforward account, but some of the readers' responses condemned the event as the work of, for example, 'Socialist ideologues' who 'actually think that kids can decide for themselves what they need to learn, despite what the real world calls for!' and as 'another load of left liberal tosh that has been planted in the minds of the young and impressionable'. These readers apparently preferred to perceive young people as victims of manipulation than as capable of independent agency.

5.3 Imagining the 'creative' and 'participating' student

Another link between creativity and voice exists at a more rhetorical level, when either is justified pragmatically as fostering aptitudes individuals allegedly need to survive or flourish in the 'creative' or 'new knowledge' economy. Creative capacities are often said to involve essential generic skills valued by employers – such as team work, identifying problems, risk-taking, self-improvement and problem-solving. Some Creative Partnerships schools (particularly but not only business and enterprise colleges) merge the language of creativity with that of 'enterprise' as if the two are equivalent. Banaji and Burn argue that the rhetoric of creativity as an economic imperative 'annexes the concept of creativity in the service of a neo-liberal economic programme and discourse'³³. A similar rhetoric can be identified in relation to student / learner voice, where it has been justified as helping develop reflexive, enterprising 'knowledge workers' who 'take responsibility for their own learning', who are self-managing, self-reliant, flexible and independent, whilst also being able to work and communicate well with others³⁴. An economic (or neo-liberal)

³¹ Hoyle, B. (2008). 'School children's manifesto for a more creative Britain'. *The Times* 27.11.08. Downloaded from http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article5247324.ece

³² Jury, L. (2008). 'Pupils call for more freedom 'to be creative''. *London Evening Standard* 26.11.08. Downloaded from <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23592911-pupils-call-for-more-freedom-to-be-creative.do>

³³ See Banaji, S. and Burn A. (2007) *Rhetorics of Creativity: a Review of the Literature*. London: Arts Council England p 56.

³⁴ Bragg, S. (2007) "'Student Voice" and governmentality: the production of enterprising subjects?'

orientation might be evident in the way that business language and practices permeate (mostly unconsciously, it seems) some of Creative Partnerships' youth voice work - the very term 'young consultants', for example, or the attention paid to marketing, branding and promotional strategies. Such individualistic interpretations are in tension with approaches that emphasise how creativity and / or participation generate collective goods or social change. Nonetheless, the links between the two concepts along this axis of enterprise may provide one insight into why youth voice has appeared a natural ally of creativity in Creative Partnerships' work.

5.4 Is creative learning inherently student-centred and participatory?

The question of whether creative learning is inherently student-centred and participatory differs from the first question about creativity and participation in one crucial respect. Whilst 'creativity' is often presented as the preserve of practitioners from outside school, the concept of 'creative learning' is potentially more open, something that can belong to, be fostered by, teachers, artists, students and others. We might compare this to the Robinson Report *All Our Futures*³⁵, which distinguished between teaching creatively (which puts the onus of creative thinking on the teacher) and teaching for creativity (which encourages creative thinking by the learner).

Even so, the link between creative learning and youth voice is not self-evident. The International Primary Curriculum, for example, is currently popular in some primary schools. The IPC uses thematic, cross-curricular approaches - commonly perceived to be important elements in creative pedagogy - and stresses the importance of what it calls 'the wow factor' as a memorable starting point for units. In one Midlands school, Creative Partnerships resourced the conversion of an empty classroom into a creative space, where an elaborate multi-media installation was built to illustrate each new theme (such as, rainforests, oceans, space, etc) and provide the necessary 'wow factor'. This was hugely popular, both with children and as a point of call for local dignitaries, politicians and others, although it was (perhaps inevitably) unsustainable in the long term. The concept of the wow factor, however, had an interesting impact on student involvement. A Creative Council was involved in suggesting ideas and discussing plans with the creative practitioner and in making decorations for it. However, children were asked to keep these a secret from others, in order not to diminish the impact of the transformed space when children were led into it for the first time. Thus this approach would seem to be in tension with developing a more fully negotiated pedagogy and curriculum.

Nevertheless, common themes appeared in our data where teachers described how involvement with Creative Partnerships had influenced their practice, and where creative practitioners described their pedagogic aims. These included: working with young people more closely, attending to their views, working from their existing knowledge and interests, becoming more flexible, enabling students to shape content, responding to issues and questions they brought, establishing partnerships, integrating learning into meaningful topics. It is questionable whether these

Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education 28 (3): 343-358

³⁵ NACCCE (1999) *All Our Futures*. London: DfEE

approaches exhaust the possibilities for creative learning experiences, or allow students radically to change the curriculum, but they were certainly described by practitioners as student-centred or participatory, particularly in contrast to previous ways of working – and experienced as a considerable source of satisfaction as a result.

We believe that some of the examples of ‘students as co-producers’ in Section 4.3 offer compelling support for the argument that creative learning must be oriented towards youth ‘voice’, to student participation and to dialogue, in contrast to ‘delivery’ models of curriculum. However, these examples also suggested that such approaches were in tension with modes of classroom organisation such as ability grouping. Where, as in most cases in our research, creative learning was being developed as an aim alongside such practices, one might question how far it has really grappled with the challenges of voice.

5.5 Reflections

In this section we have attempted to clarify why youth voice and creativity might be seen as ‘natural’ companions in Creative Partnerships’ work. These reasons vary according to the interpretation of the terms.

- We frequently encountered assumptions that creativity is inherently collaborative and creative practitioners naturally more disposed to participative approaches. We would challenge the seamlessness of the connections thus made, which are better explained by contextual factors. We will also have more to say in Section 7 about the contrasts this perspective establishes between creative practitioners and teachers.
- Similarly, while there is evidence that creative methods can successfully engage a wide range of young people and enable them to express themselves and their views in ways less reliant on formal literacy, the effect that this ‘voice’ might have is highly dependent on audience, interpretation and context.
- Discussions of both participation and of creativity sometimes converge around the values of enterprise that both are claimed to develop in students, which might help account for the significance of youth voice within Creative Partnerships thinking.
- Many (though not all) creative learning approaches that we observed or that our research participants described to us do require a significant level of involvement from young people and greater responsiveness to them by teachers. It remains to be seen how far student voice requires a challenge to, or will be allowed to disrupt, other conventional school practices.

5.6 Recommendations

- Creative Partnerships should take care to avoid formulations of its work that essentialise the qualities of creativity or creative practitioners, especially where these are contrasted with teachers.
- Expressions or outcomes of youth voice deserve to be interpreted thoughtfully and critically as part of ongoing dialogues: project planning needs to consider how to allow time and create the capacity to do this.
- Creative Partnerships should address openly the question of how far 'student voice' in creative learning is compatible with other educational practices.

Section 6: Access and inclusion

This section discusses our third area of inquiry:

RQC: Access: which 'stakeholders' are involved in Creative Partnerships projects that attempt to harness student participation?

We respond to this question here by exploring how power works in youth voice initiatives. Since Creative Partnerships works primarily (although not exclusively) in 'the most deprived communities of England', all its youth voice work could be said to address young people's exclusion. We were impressed by the genuine commitment of many Creative Partnerships staff and teachers to involve a wide range of students in voice activities and to provide access to 'elite' institutions and adult practices. Whilst acknowledging this, we have also found that power relations are reconfigured in some of the processes we researched, sometimes with some unanticipated results.

6.1 Inclusion and exclusion in 'cadre' approaches

As we have shown, one common approach to developing 'voice' in Creative Partnerships programmes and on issues related to creative teaching and learning involves working over relatively long periods of time with small 'cadre' groups of students (some of whom, in our research, already enjoyed certain privileges or status within the school, were often chosen by teachers, and included more girls than boys). This is a pragmatic solution to initiating change in large, diverse schools, and was often described by school staff as a beginning point in a longer process. To those directly involved it could prove a rich and stimulating experience.

However, as we have also noted, such groups could be perceived as elitist and even divisive to those on the outside. One primary teacher in a Midlands school (2008) had this to say:

We have terrific kids.... but only very few are given leadership roles. It's given those children incredible confidence, they are so outspoken and sure of themselves but for the little people left behind it's a bit of a problem, 'cause they really are good kids. You are using your academically sound children to be involved [because of the need for them to miss lessons], but there are lower ability group children who are very good leaders, but they don't have the opportunity ... it is a dividing thing.

Some members of governance groups recognised this too, pointing out that it could be socially difficult for them - *'most of the people hated me because I was picked for everything'* (youth forum, Pink secondary) as a Y10 girl remarked of earlier school experiences. Two male students in different secondary schools told us that because of their involvement in such groups their views were sought and respected by teachers, which they recognised was a positive experience for them but not for their peers.

In turn it appeared that belonging to such groups could separate young people from their peers. In two of our youth forum events (2009) some Creative Council members

expressed dismissive attitudes to other students, one suggesting that *'some people take the opportunities that are given and some choose not to'* (Y10 boy), and two Y9 girls appearing to pre-judge those interested in joining the Council: *'they want just to get out of lessons, but they're not prepared to put the work in', 'we knew what they were capable of before the interviews'*.

Such responses and reactions seemed to reflect and refract existing power structures and relations in particular schools, a perceived scarcity of wider opportunities open to all students, and how hierarchies of ability were reinforced and naturalised. One North East Creative Partnerships Regional Director told a story about a young man surprised (and delighted) to have been picked for a student research team because he thought he was *'too thick'*, whilst in one youth forum, a Y10 girl not chosen for a particular school event cried out *'is it 'cause I'm not clever, is it 'cause I'm thick?'*. Whilst individual students' self-image may change through positive experiences of unexpected inclusion, the division of students into 'clever' and 'thick' is likely to be more resistant to challenge. And where such troubling responses were less in evidence, this seemed to be because the overall school environment was experienced as more equitable.

These points do not suggest that 'cadre' youth voice activities have no validity or worth. They do, however, aim to contribute to our argument about the importance of wider contextual factors.

6.2 Access to/by 'professionalised' youth voice

Many of our adult interviewees recognised that making youth participation meaningful and significant required considerable support if it was to be more than a 'token young person on the table'. Young people needed to be 'skilled up', especially if their work required understanding of creativity and the creative industries, or research skills. Some creative practitioners and Creative Partnerships personnel argued that long-term, intense work with cadre groups enabled work at a higher 'creative level' that young people would ultimately gain more from, or that would enable them *'to challenge adults about their behaviour and to develop ideas and thinking in a complex way about teaching and learning'* (Creative Partnerships RD, Midlands, 2008). This approach has in many cases therefore created groups of young people who can 'represent' 'youth voice' and be listened to. They become, in effect, 'professional young people'. There are obvious tactical advantages here in terms of their potential efficacy and ability to make real changes.

However, it can pose some dilemmas. The groups themselves are in great demand to 'perform' to adult audiences, with the attendant risks that such repeated performances become ritualistic (what some adults referred to as the 'performing poodle' syndrome). Moreover, if they gain public visibility and success, they are likely to find themselves the object of attention from other local organisations looking for convenient or ready-made ways to consult young people, as one Northern Creative Partnerships Programme Manager explained:

The local council, the police and all sorts of people get in touch with the Youth Voice Team and say 'Could we canvas young people's opinions on X, Y, Z through you?'...

[Interview 2008]

Being called on in this way might enable the young people involved to reinforce and transfer learning into different contexts, and to gain experience of other key institutions shaping their lives. However, it might also be important to resist this extension of their remit, to encourage more imaginative ways of involving more, and different, young people by the organisations involved.

Further, age is more of a reference point than other axes of identity, such as race, class and gender. This may be a necessary tactic, allowing the groups to be maximally effective and coherent. However, it also risks homogenising voice, failing to account for a diversity of viewpoints, cultures and identities, or for conflict and differences between young people. Arnot and Reay's research on participative approaches in classrooms argues that those with the existing communication skills to take advantage of them (often middle class girls) flourish and others (especially, white working class boys) fall further behind³⁶. Participation, therefore, does not automatically lead to greater equality *between* young people.

Finally: in order to be recognised as 'professional' youth, young people had to conduct themselves in particular ways. Whilst many adults acknowledged that their usual ways of doing things (such as an over-reliance on paperwork) would have to change, young people often had to accommodate themselves to adult-determined processes, such as interviews or local authority strategies. When Creative Partnerships regional directors talked of the importance of young people learning to '*respond appropriately, understanding consequences and the responsibilities that come with decision making*' (Creative Partnerships Regional Director North West, 2007) or said that they were '*looking for people who can be skilled in sharing the space for decision making*' (Creative Partnerships RD East Midlands, 2008), they seemed to require of young people that they learn a deliberative, rational voice – one that can be understood by adults, is measured and not (too) disruptive. While there is evident logic to this position, it often seemed to stress the skills and knowledge that young people lacked, rather than adults' need for development or what adults could learn from young people about participation.

In contrast, in another body of thinking and writing, young people are celebrated as pioneers in radical new forms of participatory digital culture found for instance in online games, social networking sites, websites, blogs, zines, virtual worlds, and so on³⁷. These are both participatory and creative, dissolving firm boundaries between

³⁶ Arnot, M. and Reay, D. (2007) A Sociology of Pedagogic Voice: Power, inequality and pupil consultation. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, Volume 28, Issue 3, p. 322

³⁷ See for instance many of the articles by Henry Jenkins on www.henryjenkins.org; also Rheingold, H. (2008) 'Using Participatory Media and Public Voice to Encourage Civic Engagement' in Bennett, W.L. (ed.) *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 97–118.

audiences and creators. Of course, it may be that too much hope is invested in these cultures as a way to revitalise democracy and citizenship. But we would argue that Creative Partnerships is potentially in a strong position to build on or incorporate young people's existing participatory cultural forms within adult agendas, and to recognise other forms of participation or of being 'political', including in low-key and everyday spaces.

6.3 'Voice' and 'empowerment'

A critical issue is the more general 'empowerment' that youth voice provides – including whether and how it might be given recognition and credentials, allowing young people to trade it as cultural or educational capital. Many of our interviewees discussed 'giving' young people the 'tools' or 'skills' of voice as if such these were neutral and context-free objects that could be 'handed over' to young people. This justified a focus on evaluating what students gained, primarily in the context of the particular project. However, we would argue that this conceptualisation is problematic.

In some cases, Creative Partnerships involvement certainly seemed to have provided transformative experiences for young people, changing their sense of themselves, and setting them on new academic or career paths. Many students to whom we spoke described how the experience and skills gained would be 'useful for the future' as if imagining job and college applications. Some were quite clear about their instrumental use of opportunities offered by voice initiatives – such as the student quoted in 4.1.3b, who relished learning media production skills, whilst remaining cynical about effecting any real changes to the urban regeneration agenda. The sustained nature of Creative Councils and similar initiatives made it possible for students to acquire Arts Awards recognising 'arts leadership', although the take-up of this was varied.

Nonetheless, one Midlands Creative Partnerships RD reflected thoughtfully on the limits of such empowerment. Discussing members of the Youth Board (see cameo 4.1.2a), he commented that some of them were now leaving school but looking at 'much lower aspiration jobs, or career paths':

They are articulate, they are confident in this sphere, but when it comes to another sphere have we quite managed to... translate some of the achievements there into other parts of their lives? ... One might have hoped that if you'd been in a leadership position in one area, if you like, you would say, actually I'm better than this.

Despite the lengthy and intensive work the young people had engaged in with Creative Partnerships, it appeared to have remained separate from the rest of their lives, in school and beyond, where they were not able (or invited) to exercise agency in the same way. Geographer Mike Kesby has suggested that we need to look at the *environments and spaces* of participation, and that a focus on 'deepening participation' and 'getting the conditions right' may overlook the fact that the social relations of participation may have little purchase outside the specific sites that give

them meaning. Where projects seemingly fail to produce sustainable effects, Kesby argues, this may not only be because a period of participation did not last long enough but also because the *environment* of participation did not extend far enough³⁸.

In the light of this argument we might look anew at – for instance - our cameo of Green primary school in 4.3.4a. During their learning, children went outside the classroom, demonstrating in the streets and sharing their work with children from other schools. Or we might review the significance of some ‘Talkback’ students (cameo 4.3.4b) making an audio documentary on youth-police relationships, who felt able to approach two policemen and ask them to come into school to discuss the topic. In both cases students carried over a newly acquired social agency from school onto the streets. ‘Reperforming’ in these different contexts may make a greater contribution to developing sustained empowered identities than is usually recognised. Creating the conditions for youth empowerment in educational terms would seem to require building more generally participative structures throughout a school rather than or as well as perfecting them within specially established sites.

6.4 Reflections

- This section has explored the genuine dilemmas of developing small groups of young people to represent ‘youth voice’. Intensive work of this sort can provide deep learning and confidence building and thus enable challenge and change. However, its potential to create or reinforce divisions and hierarchies must also be addressed.
- Voice activities oriented to ‘adult’ institutions and processes have implicit rules or ‘codes of conduct’ that shape what can be said, and how. These may be more or less amenable to different social groups, which may also result in inequitable access to such voice.
- Locating any voice initiative within its wider context to understand its effect is crucial here. The existence of small groups of students in positions of governance does not by itself allow conclusions to be drawn about the strength of ‘youth voice’ within a school; the more general experience of students needs to be considered. Cadre groups in equitable school environments appear less likely to have divisive effects. Similarly, benefits from intense experiences of participation may not transfer to less receptive contexts.

6.5 Recommendations

- Lack of interest in voice initiatives from particular social groupings in school should spur reflection about any possible inadequacies of projects rather than be dismissed.

³⁸ Kesby, M. (2007) ‘Spatialising participatory approaches: the contribution of geography to a mature debate’ *Environment and Planning A* 39: 2813-2831

- Creative Partnerships may wish to give greater attention to how young people's cultures and practices can contribute to the debate about participation and voice.
- Evaluations of the sustainability and effects of participation should not consider only the particular project or arena where skills, resources, networks and relations were established, but consider whether and how those were or could be redeployed, rehearsed and re-enacted in different contexts.

Section 7: Learning and participation

RQD: (How) does participation offer new forms of identity and relationships to schools, teachers, creative practitioners and students in the creative learning process?

Previous research has suggested how Creative Partnerships' work offers new forms of identity and relationships in schools. Thomson et al found that all 40 of the Creative Partnerships schools they sampled in their school change project reported '*some changes in teacher–student relationships, and in the general 'feeling' in the school*' and they argue that involvement with Creative Partnerships often provides schools in disadvantaged areas with new stories to tell about themselves that support the '*internal remaking of school identity*'. Miles argues that close work with creative practitioners widens the range of possibilities open to young people, placing identity work closer to the centre of learning. Griffiths describes teachers working with creative practitioners and students to create new 'public spaces', where young people may begin to develop a sense of possibility and increased agency and confidence. The long-term nature of the partnerships Creative Partnerships encourages between teachers and creative practitioners permits sustained shifts in pedagogy. Jones and Owen argue that in some schools Creative Partnerships has increased teachers' collegiality and belief in their own professionalism and ability to make decisions³⁹.

Our question, however, focuses more specifically on the role of participation in these processes. Our findings lead us in two rather different directions – one that warns of tendencies that could act as obstacles to the development of such work, but another that suggests what can be achieved.

7.1 Relating narratives – constructions of 'the other' in voice discourse

Many accounts of participation that we gathered in the course of our research showed some of our familiar, culturally-available stories about what happens in schools and in classrooms, about who young people are, who teachers are, and which and where and how other adults can intervene. They characterised the roles of different groups and actors in these stories, constructing identities and narratives through contrasts and oppositions.

In 5.1, we noted that some of our Creative Partnerships interviewees held that creative practitioners are inherently more inclined towards inclusive, collaborative, egalitarian relationships with young people than are teachers. More generally we at times perceived an undercurrent of negativity towards teachers within some

³⁹ Jones, K., Thomson, P. et al (2007) *Creative School Change, Interim Report*. London: Creativity, Culture and Education; Miles, S. (2007) 'Feeling 10 feet tall: creative inclusion in a community of practice' *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 28 (4): 505-518; Griffiths, M. (2006) 'Learning to be in public spaces: in from the margins with dancers, sculptors, painters and musicians' *British Journal of Educational Studies* 54 (3): 352–371; Jones, K., and Owen, N. (2008) 'That's Entertainment: how teachers represent their work with Creative Partnerships artists'. Paper presented at the *7th Discourse Power Resistance Conference*, Manchester

Creative Partnerships voice work, portraying them as uncreative, less willing to work in partnership with young people, and therefore as obstacles to change. It was certainly not ubiquitous, but it did reappear in different contexts. A creative programmer (North West) suggested that '*Teachers can become very blinkered and inward looking and creative practitioners can help them to look outwards*'. At a Youth Voice training course for creative practitioners the trainer joked '*teachers can't think outside of a box, they're too busy ticking it*'. Teachers' work was presented unflatteringly – for example as '*hammering in nails of knowledge*' rather than engaging creatively with students. At the end of a Young Consultants event at a local arts centre (April, 2008), a Creative Partnerships staff member jokily asked students if they were looking forward to going back to school, provoking predictably negative responses – and thereby colluding with an image of school as dreary and uninspiring.

We observed creative practitioners too reinforcing distinctions between their (more exciting) work and (less exciting) lessons. One example is a DVD produced by the arts group running the 'Get In' student documenters project described in cameo 4.3.3a. The DVD was to be shown in school assemblies and the like, to encourage young people to get involved in the project. Through the juxtaposition of visual and audio devices, the Get In project is presented as fun and interesting, school as dull and boring, artists as full of colour and enthusiasm, teachers as dull and stern. The DVD opens with a scene in a classroom, in black and white with the sound of a ticking clock overlaid to suggest the monotony of a day at school. The teacher stands at the front of the class in a suit and tie, glaring at the students. The voice over begins, '*it's a normal boring day at school. Wouldn't you prefer to be doing something better instead?*'. The students then abandon the classroom, whereupon the film turns to colour. We hear young people running and shouting excitedly outside the school. Artists dressed in bright costumes mingle with them. The voiceover explains the project, and finally two girls shout to the camera '*are you brave enough to Get In?*'. Here, the address is solely to young people, suggesting that their courage, together with support from artists, will transform schools and learning.

Jones and Owen note the hyperbole around '*the iconic, catalytic figure of the visiting artist...offering the portal to skills, learning, funding and a better life for us all*'. They suggest that the discourse of the artist as 'special one' may in fact be a natural consequence of the decline in teachers' professional identity and status. And of course in relation to the Get In DVD, we should allow for an element of humorous hyperbole that even teachers are able to appreciate and enjoy. Yet, such portrayals conflict with the kinds of images used to encourage adults into the teaching profession. For example on the Teacher Training Agency website, the most common images show young people active, smiling or seemingly mid-sentence, looking up and out of the frame as if towards the teacher. Young people, this suggests, will reward teachers' work with love and affection rather than boredom. Their energy is a selling point, an attraction rather than something teachers must repress. Teacher identity here is directly linked to the possibility of creativity and connection with

young people – which means that invidious comparisons with artists are out of step with teachers' own (desired) self-image and identity.

In another sharp contrast to the 'heroic' image of students used by projects such as Get In when addressing youth directly, a deficit discourse about young people emerged in some of our interviews with Creative Partnerships regional directors, creative practitioners, and, to a lesser extent, teachers, even alongside a concern to develop voice. This could express itself as an 'ideology of immaturity'⁴⁰ – '*they have limited experience, they're children. They don't necessarily know what's best for them!*' [Creative Partnerships Regional Director, South East], or as a dismissal of young people's family background:

Children have never been asked their opinion on anything, which is to do with the family culture and lack of aspiration. These children lack life experiences ... I genuinely think the real problem is that they have got nothing to write about. ... because they go home, they stay at home, they come to school, there isn't anything else in-between, so maybe it's not just not being exposed to cultural things but just sort of more wider life experiences. They don't go places, and I think then it's harder for them to write about stuff. I think that's a really key point because often this lack of attainment is not about lack of capacity, it's just, if you're asking people to be creative but they haven't got anything to draw on in terms of their experience that's problematic, and in this particular instance we took them to see a really good theatre company and when they came back they wrote and they wrote and they wrote! The practitioner was really quite amazed at the difference that it made.

(Creative Partnerships Regional Programmer, North West, 2008)

Some teachers also express this view, as we noted in a discussion with a teacher at a primary school:

She then explained that another Creative Partnerships project had involved years 2-6 and was a 'literacy' project. This had involved increasing the children's access to 'life experiences' by taking them on trips to places outside of the area and then bringing them back into school to write about these experiences. She said that the children have mostly never been out of the area before and therefore had 'no life experiences' to draw on in their literacy work.

[Fieldnotes April 2008, East Midlands]

Whilst such attitudes were not universal, they are nonetheless recognisable accounts of disadvantaged communities and they pose considerable problems for youth voice work.

They are permeated by disdain for students' cultures and communities and for mundane experiences, seeing creativity as a force that must come from beyond the everyday. Young people (specifically, those from working class or as in the first quotation minority ethnic communities) are seen as lacking – in 'life experiences', literacy, communication skills, aspiration and mobility. They need to be given tools

⁴⁰ Lodge, C. (2005) 'From hearing voices to engaging in dialogue: problematising student participation in school improvement' *Journal of Educational Change* (6): 125-146

to provide voice, agency and enlightenment, to be raised to the level of their more privileged and cosmopolitan counterparts, rather than having anything to give.

Young people also tell stories about one another, rarely seeing 'youth' as a homogenous group. As we have noted, the image of 'chavs' - offensive shorthand for white, working class communities – was frequently summoned up by young people, especially in discussing school or community tensions and as groups that would not be interested or capable of participating in youth voice projects. Also as we saw in 6.1, some of those engaged in youth voice work were dismissive of others as lacking in initiative and ideas, or having a 'bad' attitude, not participating because they 'can't be bothered'. The symbol and invocation of the 'participating' student served to devalue others. As Kesby argues, where 'voice' is seen as an irrefutable 'good', the inability or refusal of some to participate risks being overlooked or dismissed as irrational⁴¹. In this way youth voice may even contribute to perpetuating and justifying existing inequalities, rather than challenging them.

7.2 Youth voice and 're-seeing'

Michael Fielding has written of the importance of what he terms 're-seeing', which *'has to do with circumstances and orientations that help us to transcend traditional roles and re-see each other'*. He argues that this has *'tremendous educative potential'* through its capacity for positive and creative disruption of assumptions and confining judgement. He advocates that we:

*foreground ways in which we can (a) create conditions for challenging enquiry and (b) co-construct structural spaces where the kind of challenges that help us re-see each other and ourselves are recognised and legitimated*⁴².

We have already pointed to many instances where Creative Partnerships' youth voice work helps create the conditions and spaces for such 're-seeing'. Extending student involvement into new areas, such as planning and evaluating programmes of creative work, school design, or questions of teaching and learning rather than more peripheral aspects of school life, has changed perceptions of young people's capabilities (by the young people themselves as well as adults, helping them to 're-see' their own identities and roles). Teachers can find out new things about their students by seeing them engaged with creative or voice projects, in the classroom or in new spaces inside and outside school. In contrast to the 'deficit discourse' about young people referred to above, some creative practitioners and teachers defined culture more inclusively and set out to mobilise and learn from students' cultures and practices, helped by the tools creative practitioners could provide. Many of those who participated in our research argued that 'youth voice' flourished best in schools where positive relationships and mutual respect *with* and *between* adults and young people were the norm, rather than existing in isolated 'projects'. They

⁴¹ Kesby, M. (2007) 'Spatialising participatory approaches: the contribution of geography to a mature debate' *Environment and Planning A* 39: 2813-2831

⁴² M. Fielding (2009) Education, Identity and the possibility of democratic public space in schools. Paper presented at ESRC Seminar Series on "The educational and social impact of new technologies on young people in Britain", LSE, London March 2009

argued that it was not a question of ‘youth voice’ taking priority over ‘teacher voice’, but centrally about dialogue within a school community.

Teachers’ accounts tended to stress mutual learning:

[The creative practitioner] didn’t think we could do it like that, with a whole class, he thought you’d have to take small groups out...but it’s better, you lose the autonomy somehow...so between us we worked out something new. The children did it themselves, they just ran with it

[Y2Teacher, Green primary]

Similarly, Jones and Owen argue that a positive consequence of working with creative practitioners is that teachers re-discover (‘re-see’) their own professional competence, rather than acquire completely new skills. In addition, in teachers’ accounts, the blurring of sharp distinctions between teachers and creative practitioners seemed to be one of the characteristics of successful work. They valued artists who were prepared to ‘*work alongside us, and learn from us like we learn from them*’ (Y1 teacher, Red Primary). A teacher in Green primary (cameo 4.3.4a) praised creative practitioners who are ‘*really working with process*’ and who are ‘*not just artists, they understand the developmental aspects of the children*’. Some commented that whilst the different perspectives outsiders brought were valuable, their ‘other colleagues’ were just as much a source of inspiration.

Whilst these accounts rely less on polarising the roles of those involved, ‘youth voice’ may nonetheless contribute to restructuring both adult and youth identities in challenging ways⁴³. To a great extent, age-based identities are produced in relation to each other – adults are deemed to be what children are not (for example, active, independent, competent, rational, and so on), an interactive process Alanen calls ‘generationing’⁴⁴. Any shift in how young people are conceptualised therefore has implications for adult identities, and we need to address this, especially if and where it proves disorienting. Some versions of voice as ‘co-production’ in learning, in particular, may destabilise accepted relationships in schools. Our evidence suggests that situations described by a Y6 girl (cameo 4.3.5a), where ‘*the teacher can sometimes be the child and the child can be the teacher*’ are rare, although a rhetoric of teachers as ‘lead learners’ was becoming popular. Where schools have moved towards greater fluidity and range in the roles and identities available to both children and adults, they have done so positively, by emphasising and demonstrating the gains that all parties stand to make through this, rather than negatively.

In this report we have argued that we need to analyse youth voice in terms of relationships and within its material and spatial contexts. This is based on empirical evidence about the various forms of adult support underpinning youth participation,

⁴³ Facer, K. (2008) *What does it mean to be an ‘adult’ in an era of children’s rights and learner voice?* Draft Working Paper presented as Closing Keynote at the ‘Why Learner Voice?’ Conference, Warwick University, October 23 2008.

⁴⁴ Alanen, L. & Mayall, B. (Eds.) (2001). *Conceptualizing child-adult relations*. London: Falmer

but it is also an argument about how agency is produced, which applies equally to adults and has political implications. Discussing the naivety of some commentators who celebrate children as ‘digital natives’, Facer remarks that their competencies derive not from their youth *per se*, but from ‘their participation in a complex set of networks and their access to diverse material and cultural resources’ - all of which is facilitated by adults⁴⁵. To obscure or discount the role of adults by representing youth voice as self-generated could actively disadvantage young people who lack such facilities in their lives outside school, and further entrench and naturalise other young people’s existing privileges.

Similarly, the ‘autonomous’ individual, seemingly independent of other people and possessing context-free skills, is (too) often referred to as an ideal outcome of education, and of ‘youth voice’ in particular. We propose that more complex understandings would be developed by acknowledging that and how child and adult identities are mutually imbricated and that both are multiple, unstable and varied according to context; that agency must emerge from the resources that others provide, from participation in networks and relationships that join us to others rather than separate us from them. Accepting our inter-dependence would help us see what adults and children have in common as well as our differences, and contribute to developing new dialogues.

7.3 Reflections

- ‘Youth voice’ work has the potential to offer new forms of identity and relationships to schools, teachers, creative practitioners and students. However accounts of this potential that draw on polarised, binary distinctions between the different groups involved and particularly on deficit discourses about young people and teachers, are very likely to limit the reach and appeal of voice work.
- Enabling contexts for creative learning and participation would foreground and rethink youth-adult relations, develop new ways of talking about *all* young people in terms of their capabilities, offer positive identities for all those involved in these processes and assume that critical dialogue is possible and desirable amongst all members of a school community.

7.4 Recommendations

- Creative Partnerships should be critically aware of how accounts of youth voice are constructed, and resist those that are too polarising or that rely on deficit models of teachers and youth; and it should be sensitive to the identity work involved in teaching and learning.

⁴⁵ Facer, K. (2008) as above

Section 8: Orientations in youth voice

It was originally our intention to offer a 'typology' of youth voice initiatives within Creative Partnerships. However, we came to believe that a broad characterisation of existing work would be of limited use to Creative Partnerships as it developed. Instead we offer here some suggestions to help understand the 'inflections' or 'orientations' of voice in the approaches we researched, which we believe are likely to persist even as specific modes of realisation or implementation change. None of the categories are entirely distinct from each other, rather, they suggest different emphases in how 'voice' is conceived (implicitly or explicitly), the methods and technologies used to construct it, how young people are addressed and the discursive resources offered to them as the means to understand themselves and their work. These all embed values, assumptions and norms that affect '*which young people are able to speak, about what, and how*'⁴⁶ and therefore raise questions about how far they may help constitute an agency capable of challenging inequality.

Inflection towards...	Involves...	Examples
Culture/ the arts	being able to talk about creativity, cultural training – understanding of arts, creative industries, self-identification as an audience or even as an artist; urban and cultural mobility	Creative Councils Room 13 Youth-run arts events
Enterprise	promotional and enterprising values. Acceptance of and entrepreneurial skills in branding, marketing, etc – including of self	Feature of much Creative Partnerships work Youth voice on regeneration e.g. URB
Emotional / therapeutic	voice imagined as expression of emotional self, language of (unquestionable) inner truths, needs, wants, opinions, beliefs	'Pupil voice' resource 4.2 Voice as SEAL
Evidence-based	positivist social science research methods to substantiate (and delimit) concerns and views. Familiarity with surveys, questionnaires, interviewing etc	Student documenters, researchers, evaluators
Learner voice	voice directed specifically at questions of learning, especially creative learning in Creative Partnerships.	Creative Councils, Student researchers etc where these address learning

⁴⁶ Lodge, C. (2005) 'From hearing voices to engaging in dialogue: problematising student participation in school improvement' *Journal of Educational Change* (6): 125-146

	Language of education, self as 'learner' (both teacher and student)	
Consumer	Expression without analysis of preferences and views. Some voice approaches invite students to position their peers as consumers	When student views are canvassed by student researchers etc (as well as by schools themselves). Students 'marking' teacher lessons
Democracy, citizenship, participation	Self as part of collective, social agency, change and potential challenge to status quo	Creative Partnerships links to local Councils etc Green primary 'global citizenship'
Critical, reflexive	Reflecting critically on the conditions of its own production – how voice comes to be	...?

Culture/ the arts

One strand of Creative Partnerships' voice work encourages young people to learn to talk with some authority about creativity and 'the arts'. In some cases students are invited to consider different definitions of creativity in their classrooms. In many of the cadre approaches we researched, small groups of students explored the creative industries through visits to arts venues, events and workplaces; some commissioned artists for art galleries or for their schools, organised creative events (such as youth film festivals), contributed to their local council's cultural strategy, or worked in / with galleries and museums. Room 13 enables children to learn about art practice by working alongside professional artists.

Creative Partnerships staff sometimes implied that such work entailed greater geographical mobility – entering the central spaces of the city from more isolated, supposedly culturally deprived communities, for example - and thus what might be seen as a 'cosmopolitan' outlook. Young people may also come to see themselves as audiences or prospective workers within the creative industries. More rarely, they might come to define themselves as artists (for instance, arts prizes sponsored by Creative Partnerships would encourage this). An interesting question is how far young people address and engage with one understanding of art's role, as that of subversion and critique.

Enterprise

In many voice projects we encountered an emphasis on enterprise and promotion - being aware of branding, design, look as well as substance, being business-, audience- or service-oriented. This could extend from attempts to sell students' artwork, to how creative events are organised or how campaigns against school closure and other forms of activism are conducted; it might include using students' creative work to promote the school. It could also be discerned in the infiltration of

‘business’ language into youth voice work as discussed in 5.3. Here young people develop skills associated with entrepreneurialism, alongside a certain outlook on the world, a construction of identity as active, responsible, agentic and self-managing rather than collective and community-oriented. (The contrasting, negative constructions of non-involved young people by some Creative Council members to whom we talked, for instance, might be seen as evidence of the successful internalisation of these norms.)

Whilst enterprise did not generally conflict with orientations towards the arts as industries and businesses, it might with versions of the arts that stress their capacity for disrupting and unsettling social norms and assumptions.

Emotional /therapeutic

As we discussed in section 4.2, some definitions of voice emphasise individual creative outlets whilst others acknowledge the affective, embodied experiences of participation. Yet others went further in envisaging voice as the expression of an ‘emotional self’. Students are encouraged to see themselves as individuals with (static) wants, needs, beliefs. These were held to be unchallengeable because they arose from an ‘essential’ inner self.

Whilst emotional voice could be the main focus of some projects, for example in relation to SEAL, in other voice work it ran alongside other approaches. Here a version of ‘rights’ discourse re-emerged as one’s ‘entitlement’ to hold a view, even if plainly wrong – as one Y7 student said to another who had challenged her interpretation of an image, *‘but it’s my opinion, you can’t say it’s not right, because it’s my opinion’*. Thus emotional voice is paradoxical – it encourages the revelation of the inner and the personal, usually seen as rendering the speaker vulnerable, but at the very same time it accords the speaker power, since what is ‘shared’ should not be subjected to critique or analysis. It may be the latter that gives it its appeal. How far it challenges educational discourses of rationality and disinterested enquiry remains to be seen.

Evidence-based

Student researchers / evaluators and youth voice groups such as those canvassing peer opinions about urban regeneration are encouraged to adopt the social science methodologies that have gained legitimacy for both academic and activist adult communities. Here, the right to be listened to depends on the quality and thoroughness of the research underpinning claims. What is said must also ideally represent a broad range of young people’s views rather than being partisan or partial.

Students here develop skills related to research and ‘academic’ training - writing questionnaires, surveys, interviewing, etc, although Creative Partnerships’ orientation to creative practices might take these in innovative directions. Such work aims to develop a measured, rational voice, insisting on substantiated opinions and claims. It may however exclude certain forms of ‘knowing’ (potentially including the intuitive and imaginative ways of knowing celebrated within an arts orientation).

Learner voice

In this orientation, students are encouraged to acquire a language for talking about teaching and learning. In many cases the focus is individualised, for example where students are asked to reflect on their own learning and 'take responsibility' for its success or failure, or for the choices they make. At other times the focus is more collective or dialogic, a mode of voice highlighted in Creative Partnerships rhetoric and policy, where voice involves the school community reflecting on their school, in dialogue with each other.

Hence, in part, the preference for the term 'learner voice' as teachers are encouraged to adopt identities as 'lead learners' alongside students, or students to become teachers. Whilst learner voice is a movement that goes beyond Creative Partnerships, Creative Partnerships' particular contribution is towards exploring *creative* learning and teaching – for example in 'school environment' projects, where the school is considered as a site for (creative) teaching and learning, or in student research into the meaning of creativity. Further research might be needed however to help understand the associations that the identity of 'learner' holds for different social groups – for instance, whether it is seen as an acquiescent, passive and / or 'feminine' position within schools, and hence how far it is compatible with other practices of youth identity-building.

Consumer voice

Students are increasingly asked to contribute their views on education, conceived as a service provided to them as consumers, which their 'feedback' and customer 'satisfaction' levels will improve. There is generally little exchange or conversation and interpretation about how questions are asked or answered. One school invited students to award teachers marks out of five for their lessons, which it claimed constituted 'student voice' in action. However, we agree with Lodge⁴⁷ that the limited framing and lack of dialogue of this kind of exercise makes a poor contribution to learning and teaching.

Whilst there is evidence of a customer-oriented approach and relationship gaining ground within education, consumer voice in this sense was rightly not a central focus of Creative Partnerships' own work, which developed more complex functions and range for voice. However, some student researchers could be seen as positioning their peers in this way when they sought their feedback through surveys they designed.

Democracy, citizenship

Discourses of democracy and citizenship were perhaps less marked in Creative Partnerships voice work than might be expected. The cadre groups many schools used to develop youth governance did not generally draw on practices such as voting and were not required to be representative or accountable as are School Councils. In some cases democracy was explicitly downplayed – the Creative School

⁴⁷ Lodge, C. (2008) *Student Voice and Learning-Focused School Improvement* International Network for School Improvement Research Matters no 32.

Change report cites an example where a School Council was rebranded as a Junior Chamber of Commerce, private enterprise trumping universal suffrage. More generally, individual responsibility and self-improvement were often emphasised above more collective identities.

Creative Partnerships' support for youth voice beyond schools encouraged young people to become more familiar with other organisations in their area and to see themselves as having some power to affect them. Such practices addressed students as a constituency – 'teenagers' – whose views should be taken into account.

Green primary school provides an exceptional example - within our data – of a pervasive commitment to addressing children as social and political actors and as global citizens, in their everyday lives as well as in exceptional events. Thus, not only did the children stage a demonstration, but they considered the consequences of habitual, mundane practices elsewhere in the world, and what they might do to bring about change. Democracy here was participative, supported by classroom processes that emphasised equality, community and the collective.

Critical, reflexive voice

We use this term to refer to work that encourages reflection on the conditions, processes and hidden rules governing the production and reception of voice, including its relation to power and status. It is an orientation we would encourage rather than one to which we can point unproblematically in our data. In some cases, creative work encouraged students to reflect on and analyse their own lives, environments and cultural experiences – the 'Talkback' social media radio project of 4.3.4b is one example, where students investigated their own local area, its history, composed dramas about aspects of their own lives such as relations with the police. But we would recommend that all voice initiatives help develop a greater awareness of how young people (and adults) are being addressed within them, what identities are being offered and what other possibilities excluded.

Summary

These orientations towards voice are neither exhaustive nor exclusive. Different youth organisations and participative practices would add to this list. They are generally also found in some combination, when for instance learner voice is developed through practices of gathering an evidence basis for arguments, or entrepreneurial values are developed within an orientation to culture and the arts. What we referred to as 'professional youth voice' also draws on several strands depending on the context and purpose for which it is generated.

However, by outlining them we hope to enable some debate about the values that underpin them, whether and where these might come into conflict, to what extent they connect to young people's existing orientations and identities, and how far they help constitute empowered identities that contribute to change.