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# *CULTIVATING CREATIVITY?*

**A report for Solihull LA on a two year project  
2003-2005**

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through the Regional Arts Lottery Programme**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Project Outline

*Teaching Creatively; Teaching for Creativity* was a two-year action research project which took place in Solihull from September 2003 to July 2005. The project was developed and led by a team of 6 advisors and arts advisory teachers, and also involved two educational psychologists; senior managers, class teachers, one class of children from 14 primary schools and an external researcher. In the second year of the project an artist team of 3 worked with the advisory team to deliver the project activity.

The project addressed the recommendations of a number of current educational strategies such as *Excellence and Enjoyment* which advises schools to 'take a fresh look at their curriculum' and 'be creative and innovative in how they teach'. It also addresses Ofsted's *Expecting the Unexpected*, the recommendations of the NACCCE report *All our Futures* and builds upon the work of the QCA in *Creativity: Find It Promote It!*.

The project sought primarily to

- a. develop arts pedagogy (including skills, knowledge and confidence in arts teaching) as a site for the development of creative learning which can be extended across the curriculum
- b. Develop pedagogical understandings of teaching creatively and teaching for creativity, integrating thinking skills where possible
- c. Develop a community of reflexive learners across, children, teachers, senior managers and the advisory and artist teams

An evaluation was undertaken by Jo Trowsdale, Dr Joe Winston (both Warwick Institute of Education) and Professor Geoff Lindsay, Director of the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Warwick. Jo Trowsdale carried out most of the fieldwork and led in the writing of this report. The focus of the research was to evaluate the project against its primary objectives. A sample of 4 school sites were chosen for focused analysis, but these data were sited within other whole project data. Data collection included structured face-to-face interviews with the advisory team, artists, head teachers, teachers and pupils; field visits to observe practice; questionnaires and analysis of documentation.

Activity took place over five terms, the first term being a planning term. Each term a different arts advisory teacher planned work in response to individual school/teacher's needs and over six half-day sessions modelled creative learning. Teachers conducted follow-up work between sessions and models of observation, reflection and some coaching occurred. Collective twilight sessions, regular team planning and review and annual conferences supported and disseminated learning.

## Findings

- Overall, the project met the objectives set
- Teachers and senior managers developed an increased value for developing creative learning pedagogies
- Planning models in schools becomes more flexible
- Teachers increased their levels of skills and confidence
- Teachers were more prepared to 'take risks' while children relished the new freedom and rose to the challenge.
- The use of questioning and co-learning were successfully modelled by advisory teachers. Teachers responded well to develop unfamiliar pedagogic style and the pupils adopted the new approach well.
- The pupils also increased their levels of confidence and recognised competencies of which they had previously been unaware.
- The teamwork that was central to the project enabled advisory teachers, advisers and artists to deepen their understanding of praxis. For many this was a welcome and liberating change from isolated working.
- Artists found the project an intense and immensely valuable learning experience and consider it has improved their own practice.
- The project has also been instrumental in changing learning cultures within the schools.
- There were a number of challenges to success in the project with many being overcome. However, some teachers found it difficult to sustain and deepen enquiry which might be seen as a conflict with the need to 'move on'.
- The entry skills of the pupils also affected the scope for development.
- Despite the overall increase in confidence, some teachers found it difficult to overcome their concerns, especially with respect to the time taken relative to other curriculum demands.
- To increase impact further, greater flexibility would be needed with respect to physical space, timetable and the curriculum.
- Sustaining action research was difficult for schools and more training in this area would be useful (e.g. the use of process diaries and the nature of evidence).
- Time and financial constraints were both identified as challenges and a third of the projects who responded with comments on future plans stated they would not continue because of these reasons.

- The development of effective collaborative practice by the artists and advisory teachers was limited by the availability of funds to support opportunities to develop mutual understanding and respect.
- There is a major challenge to reconcile the demands of the standards' agenda (e.g. SAT attainment targets) with the agenda for developing children's meta-cognition and enjoyment.
- Although there were positive indicators of cultural change in schools across the project, sustainability was a major challenge in the face of competing demands.



## **PART A: CONTEXT**

### **1. Design and Intent**

#### **1.1. National and Local Context**

Solihull Local Education Authority's '*Teaching Creatively; Teaching for Creativity*' project is a child of the 2000 NACCCE report '*All our Future*'. The report brought together current research and understandings about the important role of culture and creativity in way we educate young people and recommended changes in the curriculum to ensure that our children are equipped to actively engage with and author their roles in the changing knowledge based economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The report proposed action by the DfES, DCMS and QCA which spawned a series of initiatives that this project has drawn upon<sup>1</sup>. *All Our Futures* asserted that

'teaching creatively and teaching for creativity embrace the characteristics of all good teaching, including subject expertise, strong motivation, high expectations, the ability to communicate and listen, and the talent to interest and inspire'.

The report thus threw down the gauntlet to LEAs to

'consider making creative and cultural education one of the priorities'. This is a challenge that Solihull has taken up.

This project responded promptly to the DfES *Excellence and Enjoyment* strategy 2003, which challenged schools to

'take a fresh look at their curriculum, their timetable ... and think actively about how they would like to develop and enrich the experience they offer their children'

More recently website and published materials (2004) have explicitly referred to creativity emphasising how the strategy 'invites' schools to

'be creative and innovative in how they teach and in how they run the school [thus] empowering primary schools to take control of their curriculum'.

The action research design of a community of teachers, advisory teachers, advisers, artists and pupils working together to affect change across schools and across the borough exactly addresses the strategy's advice that schools

'commit to a programme of professional development for all their staff', and  
'look beyond their school and learn from others', 'network together and [learn] from others in sharing and developing good practice' and develop 'learning cultures' in

which the learner's voice is properly heard and instrumental in shaping the learning experience.

Although a more recent aspect of the Primary strategy (2005), the project also develops pupils emotional literacy addressing key strands of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative which is piloting resources to

‘develop the underpinning qualities and skills that help promote positive behaviour and effective learning’

The project also responds to Ofsted's *Expecting the Unexpected* (2003), a document which seeks

‘to identify good practice in the promotion of creativity in schools’.

It draws upon the *QCA Creativity Find it Promote it !* project which was making public some elements of its work public in 2003 in the preparation phase.

It has prepared those involved also for some of the most recent developments such as Ofsted's new inspection framework where, through the School Evaluation Form (SEF) schools must self assess on

‘learners’ social and cultural development ...attitudes, behaviour and ...how much they enjoy their education’,

and on

‘how well teaching [the curriculum and other activities] meet[s] the full range of learners’.

The Solihull Inspectorate and Advisory Service (SIAS) team involved in the project comprises a wealth of expertise not just in the arts but also in the field of creative learning. This project has grown out of their years’ of research predating the *All our Futures* report, through national conferences, personal research and continual professional development. This context has fostered the growth of pedagogical understandings about creativity, intelligence and learning which has generated a highly committed team ready to learn from each other and make visible that learning.

The advisory team have sought to develop a model which is not additional but can permeate and complement other learning initiatives being developed in the borough. A number of the schools involved in the project were already committed to professional development of their staff in thinking skills through ‘MindKind’<sup>2</sup> or more commonly Claxton's ‘Building Learning Power’ (BLP) (Claxton 2000). The project has maximised

the Local Authority's simultaneous commitment to and investment in developing BLP as a common language and process throughout all Solihull schools.

## **1.2. Project rationale**

This project was originally conceived as a pilot for three schools to test a model for initiating creative learning across the curriculum through the arts. However when the offer was first made to Solihull schools in 2003, the level of interest was so great<sup>3</sup> that the design had to be adapted and more personnel were brought in to develop a larger project.

The project sought to:

1. Develop a deeper pedagogical understanding of teaching creatively and teaching for creativity
2. Develop arts pedagogy based on a rationale that:
  - a. The arts provide a fertile site for the development of creative learning which can be extended across the curriculum<sup>4</sup>.
  - b. A focus upon the arts can improve the skills, knowledge and confidence of teachers in teaching the arts and in developing pedagogical understandings about the impact of learning through the arts as well as learning within the art.
  - c. Increased skill and self-esteem in the above regard would also increase teachers' likelihood to engage in creative learning behaviours which require increased risk-taking.
  - d. A focus upon the arts could contribute to schools' ability to deliver a broad and rich curriculum and could improve teachers' valuing and stimulating different kinds of intelligence – musical, kinaesthetic, visual for example.
3. Demonstrate the potency of integrating thinking skills strategies within curriculum planning.

4. Demonstrate the potency of linking artist-led learning into the curriculum.
5. Develop a learning community where good practice can be shared. This would develop with the strategic use of the advisory and educational psychologists teams supporting reflective practice and action research. The project also sought to maximise the borough's work with Guy Claxton in developing core learning behaviours.
6. Employ flexibility of approach to ensure that the project was responsive to the school's priorities

The project was underpinned by philosophies, pedagogies and practices which were relatively new to the schools, and were thus challenging established cultures and behaviours. Additionally these were typically being developed across arts disciplines where teaching was not consistently robust. The advisory team were well aware of these factors and gave significant time and energy to the design of the project to ensure that schools were supported in their development and growth through the project.

### **1.3. Project design**

The project has involved 4 advisory arts specialists, 2 inspectors, 3 professional artists, 2 educational psychologists, ICT specialists, 2 outside researchers and 14 primary schools, detailed on page 2 of the report.

The project piloted a model which combined

- *Good lead in time*

Invitations to engage in the programme were made at the head teachers conference in January 2003. A presentation and taster workshops plus a written project proposal was sent to all primary schools.

- *Regular collaborative, strategic and responsive planning between partners within and across the advisory team, schools and the artist team.*

The two-year project began in the Autumn term of 2003 with a planning term. All schools completed a written audit and engaged in planning meetings with members of the advisory team firstly to establish how the project might be realised in each setting. This enabled the team to develop a responsive project plan. Each term the team met for at least one day to review progress and implement responsive change or developments to the project plan in line with borough or project developments.

- *Strategic support from advisory team and educational psychologists to focus work in each school site in relation to the priorities identified in their School Improvement Plan and to embed practices developed from the project throughout the school*

The project package which each school bought as a project partner incorporated a number of visits from advisers and advisory teachers. Each school was allocated an advisory teacher who took on the role of being the Teaching Creatively Project (TCP)<sup>5</sup> coordinator for that school throughout the full two years of the project, providing continuity and an overview. This role was complemented by a school coordinator who was the link contact for the TCP coordinator likewise for the full two years. Whether these two staff were directly involved in the delivery of the project to pupils in any one term or not, they would be involved in termly planning and review sessions ideally with head teachers to ensure strategic development.

The two school improvement advisers, who frequently had responsibility for these schools, provided support to SMT teams, typically focusing upon the action research question and strategies for embedding learning. Schools defined their action-research in the light of the priorities of their School Improvement Plan (SIP).

Two educational psychologists were bought into the project to support the advisers in developing the action research process in each school and enriched this support further.

Schools were encouraged to plan strategically to extend the impact of the project beyond one site. Ideally they paid additional supply cover to release another / other teacher/s in the same year group to observe and then replicate lessons to their class/es. Joint review and planning sessions would then involve all teachers in the year group.

- *Advisory teachers modelled practice to sometime observing and sometime participating teachers. This action-research partnership sought to develop teacher knowledge, skills, confidence and collaborative practice; to enable teachers increasingly to lead and receive coaching as the projects progressed. Artists joined this dynamic, as modellers and co-learners.*

The relevant advisory teacher whose art form specialism was being developed in the school in any given term would plan and review with the teachers involved before and during the project with the intention of deepening understanding, increasingly engaging teachers and promoting teacher involvement in delivery both within and between the 5 or 6 advisory teacher sessions. Artists were involved in the same level of planning. The action-research partnership allies closely to the ‘knowledge creating teacher’ model advocated by Hargreaves (1998) where such partnerships develop ‘evidence of the effectiveness of practice’.

- *A focused site for developing reflective practice and research across domains*

In each of the schools practice has been sited consistently over the two years with one class of children and two teachers (one in each year of the project). The project was designed for year 3 pupils with the intention of impacting upon a changing learning culture which could grow upwards for the whole of the key stage. In most cases the target group of pupils has been year 3 or 4. Where schools chose not to work with year 3 this was typically due to other strategic reasons such as wanting to site the project with staff who had the personal or circumstantial potential to grow the project well on behalf of the school. One infant school and several special schools also joined the project. Process diaries were used by pupils in all schools to record and develop reflections on their creative learning experiences. The process of consistently focusing upon core learning processes across different arts subjects, and often other curriculum subjects, is noted by Sefton-Green as significant in developing transferable meta-learning skills because ‘moving across domains helps the learner become more explicit about the making process’ (2000).

- *Opportunity to explore benefits of arts and creativity on learning cultures*

From psychological, cultural, artistic, economic and social perspectives there is a wealth of research suggesting the benefits of creative learning in the arts as an ‘integral

part of children's learning' (Sefton-Green 2000). For example Matarasso (1997) suggests that participation in the arts

'is an effective route for personal growth, leading to enhanced confidence, skill-building and educational developments which can improve people's social contacts'

This view of creative learning in the arts as performing a transferable learning role in helping people to grow, think and feel is reflected by Huskins (1998) who notes that it is 'through sharing creativity that understanding and social inclusiveness are promoted.' But creative learning in the arts is also seen as a means for developing an understanding and appreciation of a society's literary and artistic heritage, cognitive skills and for developing team building and negotiating skills which will be significant in future work. The project offered those involved the opportunity to explore and develop any combination of these possibilities.

- *Regular collective interventions to develop pedagogy and reflective, documented practice of all partners.*

On the project launch in October 2003 the learning culture of the project was demonstrated. The day included challenging pedagogical debate around creative learning, modelling creative learning in practice and planning action research processes. This practice was sustained both through strategies outlined above and through half-termly twilight sessions where advisory team, senior managers and school project coordinators (and artists in the second year) have met to share their experiences and understandings of the project in process, advise and be advised by the advisory team.

A concentrated professional development opportunity was organised by the team in the form of a half-term visit to Norway<sup>6</sup> to examine and compare the ways in which creative and arts pedagogies and curriculum are realised in another country. The visit advanced a humanistic and holistic view of learning and modelled strong transmission of cultural practice and promoted teachers' use of a process diary and of collaborative reflections as part of a focused network.

- *advisory and artist team liaison planned for and sustained to engage artists into the project in year 2.*

A lead artist, Heather Wastie was appointed to join the advisory team's planning process a term in advance of delivery. Her role was to appraise herself of the project

ethos, processes and practicalities and pass this onto the other artists and also to represent her fellow artists as well as herself in dialogue with the team. Additional sessions were put aside for Jan Scarrott from the advisory team to project manage the artists' engagement and to work with the artists to plan and review on an ongoing basis.

#### 2003-4

- June 2003 schools pre-project audit submitted, outlining the school's expertise and prior experience in relation to creativity, thinking skills and the arts.
- Autumn term 2003 all head-teachers and school coordinators / teams met with their Teaching Creatively project coordinator (an advisory teacher) and began planning with the advisory teacher leading the Spring term sessions. At the project launch in November, schools began thinking about the focus of their school-based 'action research'.
- Spring 2003 practice in schools began with advisors leading planning and modelling practice for school-based work observed and developed by class teachers. Different models operated in each school. All involved on-going and end of term reviews which were written up and shared amongst the team. Collective reviews took place at half-termly twilight meetings. End of year conference to share practice and develop pedagogy.

This model was continued for the summer term with different art form

#### 2004-5

- Autumn 2004 model was altered slightly with schools having the entitlement to some artistic intervention alongside the advisory teacher.



## **2. Research design**

### **2.1. The researchers**

The majority of the fieldwork was carried out by Jo Trowsdale who also led on writing the report. Jo worked dialogically with the advisory team in the start-up stages of the project particularly with regard to planning the research proposal, setting up the action research for teachers, but also on the recruitment of artists. This position has enabled Jo to sustain an ongoing input into the growth of the project which was particularly significant in the first year when processes were becoming established.

However the relationship to the schools, teachers and practice observed has been that of an outsider researcher collecting fragments, synthesising and situating these within the broader canvas of action research activity and wider research in this field.

The research team includes more experienced researchers who advised on the design, validity and reporting processes as well as editorial matters.

### **2.2. The research brief.**

The key aims of the project have been articulated above in section 1.2 Project Rationale. The research activity might be summarised as investigating the assumptions or hypotheses upon which the project intent and design rests, namely that:

- (i) the arts are potentially fertile sites for promoting creativity and developing thinking skills which are relevant across the whole curriculum;
- (ii) the arts, creativity and thinking skills are all important elements of school education however in many schools they are underdeveloped
- (ii) teachers require longer-term, supported, professional development opportunities both to develop school-based learning and to implement changes to curriculum planning
- (iv) teachers trained and supported through the project will feed borough wide learning in this field.

Consequently research activity has investigated

- The developments and achievements of teachers' existing understanding, expertise and current practice in

1. good practice in the arts
  2. arts pedagogy
  3. learning through the arts
  4. developing thinking skills
  5. promoting creativity
- Factors informing such developments, particularly the significance of the individual, extent to which school infrastructures have been significant, import of research framework, import of other elements in project design, other contextual factors
  - Perceived impact of the project

Research progress was reported at two conferences, in July 2004 and June 2005.

### **2.3. Research methodology**

Given the design of the project as professional development in which teachers and advisory teachers are positioned as action-researchers, the significant role for external researchers was in their different position as outsiders who could generate an overview of particular aspects of the project.

Four school sites were selected by the advisory team as potentially strong but very different models for investigating how the project aims were being realised and becoming embedded and which might offer insight for the team in rolling out good practice more widely in the local authority. Information from these sites was interpreted in the context of a broader set of data describing progress in the remaining schools (detailed below).

The project has used a range of research methods in order to collect and report on the data. These have included:

- the textual and discourse analysis of pre-existing documentation / policy statements and ongoing project documentation
- structured face-to-face and telephone interviews
- questionnaires
- field visits and observations of practice.

## 2.4. Data Collection

Data were collected from inspectors, advisory teachers, head teachers, classroom teachers, artists and children.

Data collection for each of the focus schools involved:

- Review of initial audits
- Analysis of school data: Ofsted reports, relevant policy and planning documents
- Review of advisers' meeting notes and joint planning
- Interviews with Senior managers at the start and end of the project
- Interviews and discussions with class teachers in each of the three focus schools at visits throughout project
- Observation notes from 14 half day sessions to observe a sample of advisory teacher, artist and class teacher led sessions
- Observations recorded through notebooks, using a set of agreed pointers. This element was supported by informal use of three sample trackees selected by school to represent examples of typical learning behaviours and abilities in the class and which might represent a range of responses to creative learning, thinking skills and the arts
- Interviews with 10-12 pupils in each of the three focus schools in both Summer 2004 and 2005

Data collection which gave a broader sense of the project and how the sample schools reflected typical experiences were gathered through

- Review of notes from all project meetings; a sample of which attended
- Interviews in both years of project with arts inspector and advisory teachers
- Review of data on artists to ascertain views of their practice and experience in schools
- Interviews with artists involved
- Questionnaires sent to head teachers of all 13 schools

Visit observations and interviews were conducted to a consistent set of criteria, designed to investigate the research brief outlined above. The observation checklist focused upon signs in the physical environment and climate for learning in which the project is sited which may be significant in communicating an impression about the

creative learning culture. It also looked for characteristics or patterns that were significant in establishing the learning culture during observed sessions. These included

- stimulating displays of arts, interactive elements, investigative learning or invitations to engage in meta-learning
- readiness/ ease with which staff and pupils adapted to changes in environment / expected patterns of learning
- ownership of space
- balance of open / closed questions and tendency to respond to questions with statement / question used by adults
- balance of directorial / collaborative adult talk or tone / regularity with which instruction or persuasion were used to move things on
- range of types of talk from pupils
- evidence of creative behaviours from pupils

Interviews were conducted with head teachers and teachers at the beginning and end of the project, but typically comments were gathered on other occasions too. Questions were planned to investigate the:

- rationale for and prior/developing experience of developing the arts, creativity and thinking skills in their school
- level of pre-existing/developing arts activity within and beyond curriculum
- relevance of the project to current/ongoing SIP
- action research focus and activity
- planned and developed opportunities for embedding the project practice more widely within the school
- other perceived values / responses

In the end of project questionnaire, schools were asked to attribute a value to a series of statements about

- the design of the project,
- changes which had happened to date and
- the future impact of the project.

A second set of questionnaires which asked for prose responses in response to questions about perceived value of the project were collected by the literacy inspector and also formed part of the research data.

## 2.5. School sample

The four schools studied span the socio-economic and geographical typography of a borough which is characterised by extremities. One school is sited in one of the most affluent urban areas of the south, another in the inner-city-like poverty of the north, a third in a more rural setting, and a fourth in the suburban south.

Each site provided a different senior management model from the others and a known 'champion' for creative and arts learning within the staff. The hypothesis was that collectively the sample might provide a range of models for successfully using the project as a significant tool for whole school development.

Due to circumstance, two of the three schools (A and B) have been tracked throughout the project. A third (C) has been tracked fully in year one but only indirectly in the second year of the project. A fourth school (D) has been studied in year 2 in the stead of school C, with some retrospective review of year one data.

**School A**, is a three form entry Junior school. Numbers of pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are lower than the average for schools of this type. Attainment on entry is higher than the national average.

Several related initiatives were developing in the school before the project. Since September 2002, the head teacher was gradually engaging the whole staff in whole brain learning, developing learning to learn and thinking skills through MindKind Education. Two members of staff had also recently undertaken a professional development opportunity to develop Gifted and Talented learners which they felt might have some application for developing independent learning across the whole of their school. The head teacher, was working to develop subject leaders into playing a strategic role in school development. The arts coordinator was selected to be the Creativity project coordinator. There was significant overlap between the rationale for the project and the head teacher's development plans for the school, to develop the 'learning to learn' culture. She described the project as 'a way of *really* starting to look at how the children can learn in an *exciting, creative, vibrant* way'. She allocated additional funds and undertook significant strategic organisation of the school to enable the potential of the project to be maximised.

The school had a strong extra-curricular performing arts culture for which they regularly brought in outside specialists. In curriculum time, art was seen as a strength. In the recent year a peripatetic musician had been working with the school. Dance and drama were recognised as less developed within curriculum time and underused as mediums of learning. It was hoped that the project would help to address these areas.

**School B** is a two form entry Primary school and serves a mix of rural and suburban communities in the south of the borough. There is an above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Approximately 10% of pupils come from minority ethnic groups where English is a second language but few of these are at an early stage of learning. Attainment of pupils on entry into nursery is average.

The head teacher for year one of the project advocated 'a holistic agenda' and had encouraged both arts and flexibility in the curriculum. He stated that his criteria in appointment staff were their 'empathy with children first and foremost' and strengths in 'classroom management' which has generated a reputation for nurture being a strength of the school. Both head teachers were supportive, with the new head teacher speaking of the project as a 'tool for school development' but neither were strategically involved in the project's development.

The project, was managed by the assistant head who was also engaged in delivery in the first year. The school had prioritised developing teaching and learning and embedded both the creativity project and the local authority's Leadership for Learning initiative in their school improvement plan for the first year of the project. The strategic lead from the assistant head was evident in a series of INSET and staff meeting sessions developing whole staff engagement in the initiatives, their own understandings of creative learning, of Claxton's creative learning pedagogy, and the progress of the project. The school had begun to develop children's reflection in the arts but wanted this to be more sustained 'across the curriculum' so that the research focus was into how they might 'develop and sustain ... enquiry, reflection and deeper thinking skills'.

The presence of the arts, recognised as a strength,, was evident both in visual displays and in curriculum performance work. Art and increasingly drama are developed, but curriculum music was underdeveloped as was dance. The staff reportedly 'love the arts' because 'we find that behaviour improves the feeling about the school is better'. In the first year of the project the staff had trialled a new way of developing performance

work in a more devised, collaborative way with children. The assistant head commented on staff 'becoming more confident and flexible in their [arts] teaching' which was now less reliant upon instructional tapes and set formulae. However she was conscious that children and teachers had 'found it much harder'. The school wanted the project to develop a strong arts curriculum as well as to develop creative thinking in pupils and staff.

**School C** is a three form Junior School in the north of the borough, situated in one of the more disadvantaged wards nationally. Numbers of pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are lower than the national average. Attainment on entry is 'above average'. The head teacher is considered a strong leader having significantly improved the quality of teaching and the provision for pupils' personal development'. The school has a young staff and a relatively high staff turnover.

The head teacher stated that she implements 'a lot of professional development, a lot of INSET, demonstration lessons, team teaching and observed teaching'. This structured approach was designed 'to move the whole staff on' with extra support for those who were just 'at the baseline' or 'needing confidence developing'. She saw her staff as 'receptive to change'. She identified the planned coaching model of the creativity project as echoing her own structures for school development offering staff the opportunity 'to sit back and watch and ask "how is that lesson structured? ... what do I mean by reflective behaviour?" '.

The head teacher saw that the creativity project offered the school the opportunity both to develop teachers' curriculum arts practice and to build upon the school's teaching and learning culture. The head teacher considered that children were used to partner talk which the staff felt had developed pupils' confidence to speak out and that this was a good basis for the project. The head teacher spoke of the creativity project as a means of developing learning skills which could be developed across the curriculum.

The staff included a specialist teacher in art, music, drama and dance and had been working with the advisory music teacher to develop the music curriculum. The arts policy, profiles the arts most in extra-curricular activities.

**School D** is a one form entry primary school in the suburban south of the borough. Numbers of pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are lower than the average for schools of this type. Attainment on entry is 'average in some years and below average in other' but attainment is generally above average by the time pupils leave.

The school had a good reputation for the arts and a tradition of working with whole school performance projects. They had also profited from the 'Wider opportunity scheme' sponsored by the government and the whole of Y4 (the year most involved in the project) had been learning a brass instrument. The management team was very supportive of the arts and saw the project as both building upon strengths that the school already had and as preparing the way for future developments very much in line with Excellence and Enjoyment and Building Learning Power. They were very keen to encourage children to take on more responsibility and be autonomous in subjects across the curriculum and for staff to gain the confidence to be more creative in their curriculum planning. The school had a tradition of involving parents in processes similar to those offered by the creative project.

## **PART B: SNAPSHOTS OF THE PROJECT IN ACTION**

### **3. Praxis: intentions in action**

#### **3.1. The advisory team**

The advisory team expressed very similar views about what characterised the creative learning culture they were seeking to promote through their coaching model although the language they used around this was sometimes different and the style in which they realised it was typically different.

One advisor spoke about the principles of 'giving choice' and 'valuing teachers', which underpin her advisory work, but the whole team echoed these sentiments when they spoke of developing teachers' 'confidence in their professional skills'. Each advisory teacher had a different way of realising this, but each was highly effective in encouraging teachers to take



‘greater autonomy... to make bigger decisions about what goes on in their classroom’

and to encourage them to share that responsibility with children. Each treated their teacher partner as a valued, competent and skilled professional and yet was sensitive to the insecurities and lack of confidence teachers expressed or demonstrated. Typically they spoke openly about what the teacher had achieved, might do to extend the work for pupils and might do to challenge their own learning but checked with the teacher that they were comfortable with the level of challenge proposed. Often the prior knowledge of an advisory teacher by staff appeared to be instrumental in establishing a strong bond of professional trust and respect.

All of the advisory teachers’ practice demonstrated a desire for a less hierarchical, more dialogic model (Alexander, 2004) of learning than teachers and pupils were typically accustomed to. This was typically achieved by resisting being positioned as the ‘expert’, ‘one who knows’ by responding to questions with ‘What do you think?’, or ‘How could we find that out?’, thus ‘supporting children to be resilient so that they can then develop resourcefulness’. Such strategies were key to a collaborative learning culture. All the advisory teachers gave pupils regular opportunities ‘to articulate their thinking for longer and in a more sustained way’, modelling how the teacher might ‘keep going back to particular children to *strengthen* their contributions’. This was crucial in communicating the way a teacher signifies a value to pupils’ thinking and was typically significant in boosting self-esteem. Whole class discussion was a regular and common feature of all lessons, which often had a tenor of simultaneous intimacy and seriousness.

The advisory teachers also modelled ways in which teachers might challenge pupils to consider different possibilities, often almost suggesting a lack of surety about the direction of the work which therefore demanded further investigation. This echoes much of the child-centred practice of Reggio Emilia pedagogues who talk of asking children ‘what do we know? What do we need to know? and What do we need to do or experience to decide a way forward?’<sup>7</sup> The advisory team spoke of

‘getting [pupils] to think much more broadly about alternatives, trying things and taking risks, generating something new and getting teachers to understand that the generating of something new is value in itself.’

All the advisers modelled how teachers might enable children to work collaboratively with and in relation to other people, positioning them in different roles e.g. as leader,

follower, observer, reporter, developing the different skills within a team. Time was also given to reflecting on the challenges and rewards presented by these different ways of working, encouraging children to recognise their strengths and areas for development in using a wider repertoire of ways of working. One of the artists encouraged pupils to mount a gallery of work in progress and to act as the expert guides to other pupils and staff in the school, explaining the creative processes that were involved in this process.

All the advisers modelled challenging the typical learning environments. Most commonly this was to establish an open space in which pupils might be together with adults in an equal formation, like a circle where there is no hierarchy. Regularly within sessions pupils were grouped in different ways in different spaces and with different resources demonstrating how space and relationships might change quite naturally depending on the demands of the task. Diary entries, drawing and listening were sometimes done with pupils lying on the floor in their own space. Pupils sometimes worked flexibly across spaces, travelling and investigating other spaces, on occasion through an external visits, on others as 'detectives' investigating their school space through different eyes.

### **3.2. Involving artists**

All of the artists applied to join the project for the opportunity to work in partnership over a sustained period of time with a focus upon developing creativity. They considered this to be different from other opportunities to work with schools. The lead artist saw the project as building on her previous experiences such as those with Creative Partnerships where she had sustained creative learning relationships with particular schools over a long period of time.

The ways in which artists and advisory teachers worked together in schools followed different patterns. Artists had 6 days per school and advisory teachers 3. Where they collaborated for most if not all of the three days the partnerships were strongest. Projects with artists that were considered more successful involved two planning meetings between artist, advisory teacher and teacher, began with the artist and the advisory teacher worked responsively or in complement to the artist.

#### **4. Brief school sample case studies**

##### **4.1. School A**

School A had a clear and focused rationale for engaging in the project which generated a natural research question about how to develop independent learners and provided a focus for all partners involved. The head teacher took the initiative to implement an audit of children's views of their preferred ways of learning before and towards the end of the project to compare responses through a questionnaire which was sent home. The purpose of sending home was to ensure pupils answered individually but also profiled the project with parents and increased awareness of the changing learning culture the school is seeking to develop.

The project began in year 4 with the class of the arts coordinator. In term one the school committed significant funding to release the other year 4 teachers so that they could observe the advisory teacher sessions, reflect and plan together and then deliver the sessions for their own classes. After this term the year 4 team re-wrote the art unit drawing upon their shared experience. In term 2 the art coordinator worked with the dance advisory teacher and videoed all sessions in order to be able to review and then teach the sessions to the other year 4 classes, but no sessions were observed by other teachers. In subsequent terms finance and other commitments prevented the same level of practice being shared.

The year 4 teacher also positioned the project within a wider drive to develop pupils reflexivity about learning. On each visit the classroom manifest the process that was being developed with pupils. These included a display where children had brainstormed 'What is creativity' and 'How do we learn?' and in the second year 'What does a good learner look like?', 'What stops me from learning?' and 'What can I do when I don't know what to do?'; a wonder wall where children were encouraged to question and act as peer experts; a set of icons on the board which provided a shorthand for different learning styles and which pupils might explicitly be asked to use or conversely be asked to review their learning behaviours, evaluate how they were learning and target set what they might wish to develop further as an underused skill. In the second year of the project one of the previous year 4 teachers and a member of staff who had been involved in initial planning and the visit to Norway taught the year 5 class jointly. The arts coordinator was moved into year 3 with a view to developing similar practice.

The project was a significant success in terms of the pupils and staff directly involved. Planning processes altered, pupil confidence grew across all abilities in themselves as resourceful, competent learners, skilled in the arts, in thinking and in knowing how to manage their own learning.

In addition to those staff directly involved, several staff across senior and middle management positions were very persuaded and committed to the ideals of the project and the vision outlined by the head teacher but, this was not the case for all staff. The need for wider experiential learning remains. The head teacher has since reviewed the pace and ways in which she can expect to generate a changed learning culture for the whole staff. She intends to initiate a culture of research and investigation through

sharing learning at staff meetings and continuing the coaching model with the local authority.

#### **4.2. School B**

School B also had a clear focus for the project. As in school A other year staff, in this case the assistant head who was also a year three teacher, observed and then taught the same session to her class. In the second year only the original class, now a year 4 class were involved taught by two part-time teachers, although project activity happened only during one teacher's time. In the second year the assistant head remained involved, observing sessions occasionally but no teaching of other classes continued.

The changes of leadership, and particularly Ofsted presented significant challenges to the assistant head teacher who was responsible for sustaining the strategic focus of the project. Her passion for the arts, creative learning, the school and staff were significant in realising the successes, but strategically she was conscious that her passion for the arts was not shared by the whole staff and that typically 'a small group of creative leaders stormed ahead' whilst the majority did not.

At the outset the assistant head had spoken of wanting to support the existing 'creative arts culture' with tools to enable staff to begin to plan more from 'key questions' rather than content, to 'take risks more', be 'more spontaneous .. freer and more confident' in their own professional skills. Certainly for herself and the year 4 teacher this did happen. The first term was extremely successful, building upon a flexible joint planning model between the art advisory teacher and assistant head. This set a strong precedent for the teacher–advisory teacher partnerships throughout the project. Children were positioned as 'art detectives' and developed sustained enquiry, observation and reflection skills. A significant challenge to the development of the project in this school was the level of pupil (and teacher) knowledge and understanding in music. The need for pupils to acquire operational knowledge and skills with musical instruments was a difficulty in developing the creative processes begun in the first term. The staff and advisory teams sought to teach technical knowledge through exploration, building in opportunities for children to problem solve, generate ideas, dwell in the imagination, take risks, reflect on and value work and collaborate but this remained a challenge, not least in teacher expertise to facilitate with a high level of subject knowledge whilst making teaching and learning approaches more explicit.

Whilst the second year of the project saw no extension or sharing of work beyond the core class, the development of the new teacher involved was significant. She was open and disposed to engaging with pupil voice – as her own respectful, calm classroom management skills and open questioning suggested. Overall the coaching model was very significant in realising the intended aims for the children and staff involved in the project. The teacher spoke of feeling ‘more able to respond to the children’s input’ and to ‘work things through together with the children’. Over the three-term period observed, sessions increasingly prioritised children’s thoughts and ideas developing increased pupil ownership and had a more open-ended planning structure. Pupils were more confident and honest in their dialogue with adults, more able to analyse and justify their thinking, to make links and explain how they were learning.

Both the new head and assistant head teachers retain a commitment to developing this model strategically as a key tool for whole school development through engaging subject leaders in planning for creative learning and giving a focus to creative practice in monitoring observations. They had also decided to implement learning journals throughout key stage 2 for all curriculum subjects. They are currently engaged in further development of the project with the advisory team.

### **4.3. School C**

**School C** chose to focus its research on developing pupils’ self-esteem and confidence as learners. For the two members of staff involved from year 3 and year 4 and for particular units there were some valued and notable successes. There was progress in terms of raising staff confidence in teaching within the arts. Teachers were confident to sustain teaching sessions between and after visits from the advisory teachers as well as to lead some demonstration lessons for peers. To a lesser extent for these two teachers, pedagogical understanding about creative learning was also developed. The teacher involved in year one of the project and the art coordinator were both involved in the visit to Norway. The opportunity to reflect upon how children’s creative responses are generated informed the positive first term experience with the art advisory teacher. The review of their first term in art suggested that children had become more exploratory in their learning processes and that imaginative and critical thinking and the quality of reflection by the end of the project was greater than anticipated. However reduced teacher knowledge, understanding and confidence in a different art form was evidently an issue the following term. The practice observed after the advisory teacher

sessions was focused upon delivery strategies rather than facilitating creative learning. Consequently whilst pupils could talk qualitatively about how they had learnt in the first term, they were unable to do this about the second term. Talk focused upon content and demonstrated no reflection about value - no discernible meta-learning. A second positive experience with a visual artist and known music advisory teacher was again very successful in developing pupil's creative thinking. After this term the art coordinator spoke of wanting to create larger blocks of time for art work within curriculum time, in part, in order to retain time for reflective talk, suggesting that potentially elements of the project might be sustained and developed. However the level of pedagogical learning which had at the outset seemed primed to grow, was not developed as there was no peer with whom either year teacher might develop praxis and a less than robust commitment to developing pedagogical understanding.

The project in school C did not appear to have been sustained strategically by senior management especially in terms of developing a creative learning pedagogy. Research appeared to be underdeveloped both in focus and in systematic practice. Due to timetabling the art-coordinator could not attend termly reviews throughout the two years. The structured approach of heavy investment in staff development which the head teacher described as typical of her strategic development of learning was not extended to the project throughout the two years. Her aspiration for teachers to

‘work together in teams, in their planning and their teaching ... [and] to equip them with knowledge and understanding of how to teach art and dance and drama better .. to equip them with skills that improve their teaching and learning’

appeared to be under resourced and planned for at a strategic level so that there was no opportunity to share, grow and consolidate learning more widely across the year 3 and 4 year groups. The significant investment in two members of staff appeared to be recognised in terms of increasing arts skill.

#### **4.4. School D**

The project in school D was managed by the deputy head teacher, who was the principal teacher involved in the second year of the project. The first year was led by a year 3 teacher who has since left the school, focusing upon how creative learning strategies can impact upon behaviour and collaborative skills. The deputy and another teacher were also involved in the visit to Norway in February 2004 where they had noted a different environment and ethos which would ‘lend itself to the promotion of

creativity'. They implemented changes in the school staff room, which were warmly received, and through INET session engaged the whole staff in identifying and promoting creativity in their classrooms. This was the start of whole school interest in different ways of approaching curriculum planning which the staff and children involved in the project pioneered. They adopted a 'web-based' approach to develop links between the project and other subjects and sought to develop higher levels of creative thinking each term.

With the strategic lead from a senior manager's experiential learning this was a very successful project in initiating a new creative learning culture which is currently being grown strategically with sustained support from the advisory team and whole staff commitment. The school has begun cross-curricular, whole curriculum planning – a whole school approach about which teachers have become, in the head's words, *'positive and keen'*. The head noted that the visible aspects of the project encouraged *'a great deal of dialogue'* and that the project *'definitely moved the whole school forward'* in terms of staff understanding and consideration of creativity. Teachers are now making connections across the curriculum and are asking to develop new, more cross-curricular topics. Their planning is notably different and they are keen to continue this without losing the emphasis on skills and necessary knowledge.

The project involved children working with a visual artist in conjunction with an experienced advisory teacher and linked children's art work, critical writing and story making. A key emphasis was to connect the work with children's own cultural interests for which the topic was well suited. Of key significance for the children was the culmination of the project, in particular the turning of the classroom into an art gallery, with all children having a particular role or responsibility with regard to their 'visitors' – the other classes who came to view their work. This proved to be central to their sense of achievement. They spoke in great detail of this day, which had a double edge – people enjoying their art work and their performances in role as guides, artists, photographers, security guards etc. This performative responsibility was important to them (particularly the boys) who spoke in great detail and with great pride about this event.

The head had this comment to make at the end of the project about its impact on the school:



‘We’re doing a big arts week working on one of our values, co-operation. We’ve been creating school community through sculpture. There’s been a real buzz about the place. Co-operation is very much in evidence. The children are very much engaged. There’s been no messing about and staff are very enthusiastic. I think we’ve moved to another stage on with this’.

## **PART C: CHANGES AND CHALLENGES**

### **5. Changes**

#### **5.1. Valuing and Developing creative learning pedagogy**

Enabling teachers to learn about pedagogy and develop reflective practice were embedded in the advisory team’s collaborative modelling and coaching process which head teachers saw as ‘a comfortable’ or ‘supportive’ , ‘non-threatening’ approach. NACCEE 2000, Sternberg 1999, and Craft 2000 emphasise the significance of understanding to inform practice. This is echoed in questionnaires where head teachers unanimously considered that it was valuable and important to have time after sessions to reflect with advisory teachers and artists and develop or consolidate new understandings. Teaching staff echoed this point to us quite forcibly at school visits. They felt that the growth of learning in the project would have been severely diminished without collaborative review time.

One head teacher spoke of the project having ‘opened up the dialogue about what constitutes good learning’, an image which is almost echoed by an advisory teacher who spoke of the project ‘opening doors’ for those teachers ‘who were really prepared to think deeply about their practice’. Another added that it was not just thinking that mattered but also trying out a ‘new role as facilitator’ to practice their thinking. A third suggested that this dialogue, practice and debate offered schools the opportunity to ‘take stock of the stage that they are at in relation to pedagogy’. In the best case scenarios teachers had ‘started to question their fundamental beliefs about [learning and about] how children should be managed in the classroom’ and consequently to initiate change.

## 5.2. Planning for creative learning

All head teachers stated that they considered teachers' planning is now more flexible. From the sample schools head teachers considered that the project 'has helped as staff now realise they can take ownership of their planning, teaching and delivery' and brought some 'fresh air' into teaching. Frequently they spoke of teachers involved directly in the project as being 'more able to act like a facilitator .. more prepared to take risks .. sees that if something doesn't work ..it is an important part of the learning process'.

Most head teachers (7 out of 8) feel that their teachers now engage in more dialogic learning relationship with pupils and that the project has enabled them to better recognise and develop pupils' creativity

The teachers spoke of becoming 'more confident to allow the children to own their own learning', another that whilst they might plan for and enable it they did 'not feel such a need to control learning outcomes'. A third reported increased confidence and enjoyment in using teaching approaches, which modelled a more open-ended way of working across the curriculum. They mentioned a number of things they were now doing differently as a result of the project in terms of both their planning and delivery such as

'involving children much more in deciding how to tackle a project rather than showing them ...becoming more of a facilitator... [learning] to stimulate children to set themselves learning objectives, to be aware of how they learn...I resist the urge to answer questions by asking "How can we find out? ... standing back more to allow the children to explore their own ideas and try to solve problems themselves before asking me ...giving constant encouragement [when they are] trying it in a different way'.

Several spoke of lessons learnt which they were hoping to sustain such as trying 'to be less concerned with having an end product' and 'build[ing] in time for reflection in lessons

Advisory teachers echoed these points and also commented on other teachers in the year group who had observed the advisory teachers at work being able to adapt and alter plans to meet the needs of different classes.

Children seem to have relished the new freedoms brought about by different planning structures. Children stated that the advisory teacher 'doesn't tell you ... you can figure it out for yourself'. Others added 'I think we should have more time to find out' and 'be free ... to test things out' because 'usually in school you get a limited time and you can't do dance quickly'. In all settings children mentioned how they valued having longer blocks of time to grow ideas and develop them.

Within the project children were consulted and invited to take time to think, to collaborate in talk, listen, develop another's comment, think again. The advisory teachers modelled this co-learning practice which was teachers worked hard to sustain in their own sessions. Questioning, listening, responding with further questioning, often resisting children's demands to know the answer was a new mode of operation for most teachers but one which was embraced often as an exciting permission to engage differently with learners.

### **5.3. Increased skill, confidence and knowledge in the arts**

Eight out of the nine schools who responded to the questionnaire considered that teachers' planning now demonstrates a broader range of arts skills.

In all of the sample schools, the range and quality of arts practice of the teachers involved developed noticeably. Repeatedly teachers spoke of feeling 'more and more confident, more and more enthusiastic' and demonstrated greater readiness to teach in new arts territory e.g. dance and drama. The sample school head teachers considered that the project also 'widened our thinking on how we deliver the arts [and] developed more connectedness with other curriculum areas which are often enhanced through the arts approach'. Most head teachers (7 out of 9) did not consider that staff's inexperience in the arts had negatively affected the progress they had made, suggesting that the schools found the work accessible and pitched appropriately.

Pupils exuded and talked of increased confidence in their arts practice, for example one child 'found out that I was good at drawing cartoons'. They noted improved skills: 'I got better at everything but 'specially art'. Their wider exposure to arts experiences generated a range of knowledge and understanding. One child had learnt that 'dance is not just moving to music', another commented that, 'I had never done art with rubbish before'. Typically children rated the arts as of high significance to them after the project and a number of parents commented in a number of cases of children had 'shown more interest in the arts in last 12 months' with instances of children taking up new

after school and out of school arts activities such as dance club, learning an instrument or art club.

Two of the school studied considered that they now felt confident and capable enough to apply for an Artsmark award.

#### **5.4. Professional development of advisory and artist teams**

Having team meetings enabled the advisory teachers, advisors and artists to deepen their understanding of their praxis. They could analyse how the project design was operating, what progress they were making and how. They shared the challenges they collectively and separately faced, what strategies they were employing and applied new understandings to plan common guidance and documentation processes in response to needs, for example for evaluating, for developing the use of process diaries, for sharing understanding of the development of the project in each school.

The advisory team noted consistently similar benefits. It was the first time that they could systematically 'work with other members of the team rather than in isolation'. They valued having 'time to explore approaches to teaching and learning in a sustained way ..[and] the potential of the process diary, ... to question beliefs ... test out long held theories .. [and] work in a concentrated way' which was typically impossible in their daily roles. They considered that it had extended their 'knowledge, understanding, skills [and]... confidence', generating 'greater self belief which had 're-energised' them and confirmed their ' commitment to creative teaching and learning'. Significant in this was having on-going partnerships 'with some extremely motivated teachers' and reflecting together on how to develop children's creativity'. One described the project as 'the most wonderful ...CPD [which] I couldn't have got any other way'.

In most cases artists have found this project an intense and immensely valuable learning experience which has developed their practice – albeit to different degrees for different artists.

By the end of the project two artists considered that they had made significant changes to their practice although the process of change involved more challenge and resistance for some. The degree and the sustainability of that change is yet to be known but one spoke of being conscious of working differently, of being

'less reliant on demonstration as a model of working .. more aware of learning from the child's point of view ... of giving children more ownership of and control over their work'.

They acknowledged that their planning methods had 'become less rigid', with the other artist emphasising that he had learnt to 'present children with starting points, tools, permission to explore', to model then stand back and 'let their natural creativity emerge, intervening only when really necessary'.

They identified strongly with two descriptions of artists mentioned in early meetings. One was my own: 'Artists are invited disturbances, brought in to *change* something not just to *do* something'. The other was a definition of an artist as an 'imagineer: a creative thinker who can model a way of being which does not have an emphasis on skills'. They planned to 'listen to and trust children more' to employ the reflective tools of dialogue, process diaries and drawing which were new to them all as aids to understand children's creative learning.

### **5.5. Growing creative learners**

The majority of children who have been involved in this project in three of the four sample schools appear to have changed as learners. Of course maturation will have impacted on this process, but my impressions are echoed by those who know both these children and similar aged pupils. Across all abilities and gender pupils appeared typically to be more confident, articulate, reflective, independent, resourceful, resilient and responsible learners who are increasingly taking greater ownership of their own learning.

Pupils identified that the project had developed their 'confidence' and 'belief in myself'. They spoke of the art secret which had clearly been significant for many children who 'were more prepared to have a go without worrying that they will do it wrong'. They were consequently more able to see themselves as valued and competent learners.

'I have a big imagination and I didn't know it'

'I've learnt things in a fun way'

'I found out that I was creative and I didn't know that I was'.

Pupils saw that becoming confident in yourself as a learner was crucial as being able to ask for help, speak out in front of others and by asking someone else not to distract you

Teachers noted a number of changes in terms of a more investigative child-owned learning culture in their classrooms.

‘Children are now very questioning about why they are doing things- they need to understand the purpose ...Pupils have become much less reliant on the teacher for support and to solve problems. They appear confident to do this for themselves ...Some children are now beginning to question and challenge the ideas of others.. Children are working more independently and are choosing ways in which they learn best.

In the observed classes, pupils had become meta-learners, aware of what good learning, thinking and creative behaviour looks like and were typically able to say when they were behaving creatively, such as ‘coming up with lots of different ideas’, ‘doing things in a different way’.

They were increasingly aware of how the ways in which they worked impacted upon learning. Some pupils mentioned working for an extended time as a significant factor. They valued ‘not being rushed’. Many spoke eloquently about why they valued learning in groups, for example, being able to share and generate ideas.

‘When you do something on your own it’s like, “what do I do, what do I do?” But when you work in a group you’re not nervous or anything as you’re not on your own’.

They also valued making new friends - the social nature of learning. Often they liked the way they were put into groups they wouldn’t normally choose for themselves and despite the occasions when ‘people shout over you’ and ideas get challenged they discovered new friendships, respect or value for each other.

‘You can’t fall out with people as you can do it any way you like. Everyone’s more honest. You can never be sad in a creativity project’.

Pupils noted the different, typically less hierarchical relationship which advisory teachers often and artists all struck up with children and which fed the creative learning culture. They felt challenged to think and behave in different ways, to learn new skills, to do and think. As one child said ‘learning in different ways helps us to think in different ways’.

There has also been an overwhelming positive response of parents to the project. Almost all had noticed their pupils’ being ‘more confident and self aware’, talking more ‘about work at school and [seeming] inspired and interested but also being made to

‘think for himself’ which ‘made him more confident in the work he was doing and ‘broadened her mind’. Many spoke of wanting their child to ‘continue to have similar opportunities throughout their primary and secondary education’, that ‘this should normally be part of our children’s curriculum’

## **5.6. Changing learning cultures**

More than half of the responding head teachers considered the project to have had a strong impact upon developing a new whole school creative learning culture. One spoke of ‘some staff who were reticent to begin with [but] are now keener than ever to drive creativity across the curriculum. The whole school has focused on ‘looking for opportunities to develop creativity across the classroom – very exciting and very stimulating’. The staff have also revisited the curriculum map to make more explicit links between curriculum areas to enable a more creative approach to take place.

Head teachers recognised the need for whole school engagement in developing creativity across the curriculum if they are to be able to impact on the culture of learning and teaching in the school. One teacher warned of the danger of a small group of leaders storming ahead and not keeping the majority with them.

In one sample school a teacher spoke of ‘adjusting my mind-set’ to focus more on creative process than product, more on ways of learning than the learning outcome. In another’s termly report the advisory teacher reported ‘staff and children working outside their zone of comfort and coming out the other side’

The same cultural change might be noted for the artist who spoke of having ‘seen the value of embedding an artist into the curriculum with less of an emphasis on artistic product. In future projects I will try to recreate the feeling of joining an ongoing process rather than initiating something from scratch .... the idea of an artist weaving in and out of the curriculum is an exciting one for me’.

The use of process diaries (alternatively referred to as journals or learning logs) was a significant aid in many schools in the development of a culture of the reflective practitioner (Schon 1987) and dialogic learning. In the best-case scenarios, process diaries were

‘a key to unlocking the child’s thoughts, feelings and attitudes about themselves, their learning, their friendships and their work’.

In these instances they realised the potential suggested by sketchbook practice in art education to ‘enhance self-esteem and ...offer autonomy of thought’ (Robinson, 2000). This observation by some teachers in the project highlighted that pupils previously, and possibly typically, did not perceive that learning about their learning was valuable or valued by the teacher. The process diaries offered a vehicle for personal yet shielded dialogue between the learner and him/herself and between learners and teachers which initiated new understandings on both sides.

Three of the four sample schools have implemented using learning logs across the whole of key stage 2.

## **6. Challenges**

### **6.1. Raising confidence, skill and knowledge in the arts**

One of the challenges faced by the advisory teachers was the poor level of knowledge, skill and confidence they found in arts teaching (see Rogers 1998)

The advisory teacher for music reported that she had had to adapt her plans in several of the schools because the pupils lacked basic musical knowledge and were not habituated to working with musical instruments. In such settings the very excitement about using instruments militated against pupils being able to conduct focused exploration. Without some sureness in the subject areas, for teachers as well as pupils, the amount of creative learning that could take place was limited. To some degree, this area of challenge was noted by all the advisory teachers and was expected but was perhaps more marked or challenging than expected. Dance and drama practice was typically less developed and presented a cultural as well as confidence knowledge and skill based challenge to practitioners and the advisory staff.



## **6.2. Raising pedagogical understanding of creative learning and thinking skills**

There was a lack of understanding of the role of dialogue by teachers who either initially or consistently saw it as taking time away from practical activities 'which are what the arts are about'. This misunderstanding was sometimes compounded by teacher's unwillingness to give the time to reflective discussion about teaching and learning, to take part in inter-visit activities or make connections elsewhere in the curriculum.

As change management theorists suggest, such teachers responses to the changes that the project advocates is not uncommon. Jacobs (1998) identifies responses such as 'shock, anxiety, denial and anger' as typical responses. If a person is supported and / or works through such initial responses they may move into 'experimentation, discovery and integration', but occasionally teachers seemed to be 'caught in the headlights', in a state of shock, 'frightened to face the challenge of change in their thinking or practice'.

The attitude of the teachers to change was a significant factor in their capacity to develop their pedagogical understandings. For some it was exciting to empower children and explore different learning relationships, but others needed 'permission' from their head teachers and themselves to think outside the structure of the national curriculum. This difficulty is evident in the choice of language and descriptions given by teachers who *have* struggled with the psychological constraints and overcome them.

'I never believe they would be able to do this – they have exceeded all my expectations'

'I feel really emotional about what they have done it is so much better than I could have imagined'

Whilst teachers worked hard at developing questioning they struggled more with sustaining and deepening enquiry which was often in conflict with their trained instinct to 'move on' with the lesson. The challenge of changing teacher delivery led practice into a more co-learning, investigative model. Pupil response suggested that in most cases such practice was restricted to creativity project sessions and had not yet extended into the wider curriculum.

A particular challenge was the change of class teacher in the second year of the project to one who typically had not been involved in the development of the project to date. Those few schools where the member of staff had been involved in some capacity in year one, noted benefits at the point of transition. However advisory staff noted that a 'lack of understanding of the project resulted in unintentional sabotage of advisory teacher work and interim activities being squeezed'.

### **6.3. Overcoming Fear**

Despite the consultation, joint planning, modelling and discussion time given by the advisory team, many teachers typically remained concerned about the changes the project proposed to their practice.

The most common concern was 'the amount of time taken out of the rest of the curriculum' by the project. Even where schools were fully embracing and changing practice, the process of change did require greater investment of personal and curriculum time to institute. Some teachers' desire to keep children involved would be realised by changing the focus rather than deepening it and it is difficult to know whether fear, inexperience or habit that motivates such behaviour. This was noted particularly in the second year of the project when new staff inherited the project without having been involved in the preparation and pedagogy to date and 'felt threatened by the potential disruption to their normal routines'.

Working with a highly skilled advisory teacher whose practice challenged teachers' 'comfort zones' was potentially, and reportedly for some, almost threatening. Not all teachers welcomed the opportunity to develop their practice in this way. The advisory team noted teachers struggling with 'allowing the children to take risks' and were aware that they needed repeatedly to be 'encouraging them to believe in their own creativity' and 'showing them that problems can be shared by collaboration and cooperation'.

As one head teacher noted at the end of the project that

'even when they are convinced by what they are trying to achieve [teachers] can still be cautious. It takes a long time for cultures to change and we need to acknowledge that and support the effort made to make a difference'.

#### **6.4. Developing creative learning environments**

Every session observed involved an alteration of the typical classroom environment for the children. In some cases they might travel to another space which they might regularly use for lessons, such as a music room, hall, open classroom. In others the classroom space would be altered. On occasion they might travel across a series of spaces. Frequently the resources used in the space as 'provocations' were significant in generating a different dynamic to the learning relationship taking attention away from either adult or child and creating interest. Typically sessions happened in spaces where a circle on the floor might be formed keeping everyone able to see each other and removing hierarchy. However even such minor alterations demanded significant planning and potentially disruption, to keep a hall or studio space available for a class for the whole afternoon, to move all the furniture back to clear space, to ensure that technology was available.

To really develop creative learning, greater flexibility was needed from the schools over space, timetable and curriculum. Typically traditional furniture, arrangement of learning spaces and of timetable, inflexible curriculum demands all imposed a constraint which even the keener school sites found difficult to manoeuvre around.

The significance of the learning environment was not a focal question of the project. However several teachers seemed quite attuned to the semiotic value of the visual messages that spaces communicate such as a display asking questions, collating pupil ideas, an installation feel to an art display which re-shapes a space and reminds children that environment and climate are alterable and can be re-shaped by them. Only one school tested the idea of publicly displaying work in progress to emphasise the creative explorations taken by the children<sup>8</sup>. Some children and adults found this a challenging experience because of the dominant culture of finished work being shared. The Reggio model of recording, valuing and sharing work in progress advocates a different value system to

Advisory teachers noted a negative climate for learning such as teachers' 'low [or negative] expectations of children's capacity to think or do', or even a resistance to give pupils metaphoric thinking space.

## 6.5. Developing an action research culture

Sustaining action research was a huge challenge for schools. Developing clarity about what question they wished to investigate in order for research to be focused and effective was difficult despite advisory and educational psychologists' support. This was not a practiced process for schools who needed more strategic support and perhaps for their first ideas to be more legitimised as 'pilot'. Even where that was established within the first year of the project a further challenge remained to commit to systematic collection of evidence, systematic review and interpretation. One head teacher talked of needing to 'build it into staff meeting structure' in order for future action research to become naturalised – something which she only realised as a result of the project.

The learning culture suffered from the project not having any mechanism on an ongoing basis of mapping developments to enable learning to be shared. With greater financial resources this would doubtless have been developed.

Within the practice there was frequent talk about the 'process diaries'. Whilst overall they were considered as important tools in the process there appeared to be a greater need for training of pupils by teachers in using the diaries. It appears that there would be value in modelling the ways in which children might collate fragments to articulate ideas and comment, draw and annotate, think diagrammatically. Where the purpose of the diaries was not entirely clear as personal aids for the child in learning were not advocated, children reverted to traditional ways of recording and lost interest in using them. Children need to see the purpose of doing them in their own terms. Where they were 'press-ganged' they did 'not complete them thoroughly if at all' (Bell, J. 1987). Where they were able to show an individual identity, use different ways to communicate through diagrams, notes, collage, sketches etc and had some system of signalling whether they wanted their diary looked at pupils appeared to value their role as learning tools. Where practice evolved such methods, pupils had a sense of ownership about the books and often took them home to conduct research and enjoyed reviewing them with peers and family, celebrating their own and other's achievements.

One or two schools noted a potential inequality in the different responses of boys and girls to the process diary. One teacher noted that 'girls have recorded in a far more "creative" way...Boys opt for pictorial form whereas the girls like to annotate their work which gives a greater insight'. There was also some discomfort about the apparent ability of SEN pupils to engage in the high level thinking skills which diary work has

demonstrated. Certainly there is scope for exploring other means of validating reflection

### **6.6. Time (and money)**

Of the nine schools who responded, the three stated that they do not plan to continue with the project. For these schools time was the major factor. Two also cited budgetary constraint.

The issue of time was noted repeatedly across all schools, adult teams and pupil groups. Making the project work on a limited budget also restricted meeting time for all partners. All staff spoke of the importance of being able to observe highly skilled advisory teachers at work with their pupils which enable them to observe children differently. This a model that two of the four schools studied have committed to sustaining beyond the project. However only one of the schools studied in the sample was able to resource other teachers benefiting from that experience other than the class teacher beyond first term, if at all. Additionally very few schools were able to (or prioritised) making quality reflection time available throughout the project.

The financial commitment that the schools made to engage in the project and the personal commitment that staff have made should not be underestimated. It placed a noticeable demand upon school resources. This was a demanding project to manage without additional funding. On a positive note the financial investment in the project by schools appeared to be significant in ensuring ownership, commitment and reflection at a strategic level.

However over half of the schools who responded to the questionnaire stated that they intended to continue with the work of the project – of these had no budget ear-marked and only one had committed substantial funds. Some have since become involved in a funded extension to the project through Creative Partnerships.

### **6.7. Advisory teacher- artist- teacher partnerships**

Two advisory teachers were new to the authority so the team did not know each other's practice and pedagogy before the project began. Whilst team meetings were valuable, the lack of professional development funds meant there was no opportunity to observe each other, collaborate and develop an articulated and working knowledge of each

other or of a shared praxis. In part to compensate the advisory team invested heavily in the project in terms of energy and hours of personal time, beyond the hours planned for. They planned in partnership, reviewed, evaluated, wrote up, kept on-going communications with teachers in several schools at any one time as well as modelling and coaching teacher's practice and documenting their own investigations. This internal professional culture generated an intensity which was at once powerful in developing practice as well as somewhat 'formidable'. The same advisory teacher who described the project as the most wonderful CPD also described it as 'the most challenging [two] years of my career: ...terrifying'. Artists and teachers likewise had moments of the same. In many ways this is the natural effect of the initiation of change, but in terms of limiting resistance and maximising development, it may be worth acknowledging.

A significant challenge presented by the project was for advisory teachers and artists to develop new models of working in partnership, particularly as artists came in 'part way through a scheme set up by ..and well thought out by the advisory teachers'.

Given the clarity and written descriptors for the advisory teacher roles as TCP coordinator and as lead advisory teacher roles in schools, the absence of any such definition of role for the artists or of their role in relation to the advisory teachers posed an additional difficulty. Some funding was found to give the advisory teachers and artists a day to work together which was helpful in communicating what each person was experiencing and expecting of the project but the limited budget meant that they were typically 'trying out working models on the hoof' and several people felt that they did not ever really establish 'a meaningful dialogue on equal terms' between all members of the team.

In the early days of the partnerships two artists experienced feeling 'intimidated' by 'expert' advisory teachers. Both spoke of feeling that their practice was being criticised against undebated criteria which undermined their confidence and was potentially destabilising. All of them identified that there was a need for 'more lead-in time' for dialogue and cultural exchange. As one artist said 'the children benefited from having a lot of time and space to explore their creativity but we as the guiding forces did not'. The challenges proved too great for one artist who left the project. This artist felt the inequalities of the relationship keenly and that the constraints of the project had made her practice 'less creative'. She also appeared to be at odds with the project's

emphasis upon reflection having suggested that 'over-analysing can be dangerous and potentially damaging to creativity'.

Artists found the evaluation documents used in the project to be functional, uninspiring and struggled to know what was expected of them. The most significant challenge to practice however was the different expectation of their role as emphatically 'imagineers' - instigators of creative process. Whilst they knew this was expected they were also used to working in schools where an end product was also typically expected and might often shape the process. Like teachers with the curriculum, artists needed to give themselves permission to operate in new ways. Until artists had become comfortable with product being situated as a marker on a process-led journey, this was a tension.

### **6.8. Wider school engagement and strategic change**

Many schools found ways to share their process and practice within the school. These included assemblies to the whole key stage (sometimes with parents invited) and inviting parents to some in and look at process diaries with pupils. In one instance pupils created a gallery of work in process and then acted as guides to their peers to comment on the work. However the expectation of galleries containing finished work made this experiment very challenging for the children involved as they felt peers might view their work in progress sketches as indicative of their artistic skills.

There is no doubt that the messages to schools about the significance of evidence based Ofsted assessments, focused upon SATs attainment targets, can seem at odds with the central drive for excellence and enjoyment promoted by advocates developing children's metacognition, discovery learning, the use of outside experts, experiential and situated learning, a connected curriculum.

Cultural change is an evolutionary process. Even where the project ideals have grown well and there are plans for sustaining, there is a long way to go to embed the different practices of creativity project across the curriculum on a daily basis.

## **PART D: LEGACIES AND FUTURES**

### **7. Strategic legacies for sustainability**

#### *The advisory team*

The advisory team have grown this 'formidable' project organically, shaping it to suit the schools and wider priorities of Solihull local authority. The project has drawn upon their pre-existing wealth of pedagogical knowledge in the field of creative learning and developed both their understanding and practice as a result. The core team might be considered to be at the vanguard of such practice in schools and a significant resource to the local authority in its mission to develop the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

This is echoed in the feedback from head teachers. Seven out of the eight who responded valued working with the advisory teachers, and gave this the highest possible score. Several mentioned the significance of quality modelling and coaching which was a key feature of the project design. This point is strongly echoed by the staff at all levels within the schools studied as a sample. Without exception staff considered that they would have been unable to move forward so well without the support of the advisory teacher. Evidence from our small sample suggested that knowing and trusting an advisory teacher prior to the project positively affected the climate in which the project happened, but there was no evidence to suggest that not knowing one adversely affected the progress of a project either.

One head teacher described the team as 'instrumental in developing staff' and the model they were developing as 'a real strength' which provided 'a wonderful structure within which to work' not least because it could be 'adapted in a variety of ways' to create a tailor-made experience for each school.

However the financial constraints on the project did challenge the team's ability to share understandings about practice and pedagogy. This has developed mainly through the significant personal commitment of the team to communicate and work collaboratively.

*An increased appetite for and commitment to creative learning across the curriculum from schools*



Solihull's Teaching Creatively; Teaching for Creativity project was conceived as two-year action research project to hot house models of practice to be rolled out more widely. Lessons learnt from one class have been shared in a variety of ways: across a year group, a key stage, other curriculum areas, the whole school. Lessons learnt from 13 schools involved have been shared at two conferences in 2004 and 2005 and are still developing.

Three quarters of the schools who responded to the questionnaire plan to sustain the work of the project and do not consider that the time demands of the project were too great. Half of the schools were planning to allocate a budget to continue with this kind of work. As one deputy head teacher stated 'what would be the point in investing in this to the level that we have and then not sustaining it? We've still got a way to go but we have structures in place to enable the learning to be grown'. A head teacher from the sample schools identified the benefits which have left a legacy and generated an appetite for further developments:

- 'Schools have developed new units of work, many of which have since been successfully used by other teachers.
- Parents are more aware of the benefits and have expressed strong support for such learning activities to continue and be extended across the curriculum.
- The model of working with the advisory teachers using the coaching model and team teaching will become established as a method of school improvement
- Planning will have a different focus – a move away from a purely content driven curriculum
- The principle of giving the children more choice is one we are working towards'.

The impact of the project has been to develop teachers' and schools' appetites for developing creative learning cultures which are shaping quality teaching and learning experiences. This is generating a demand for further work of this kind

### *Learning community*

Through the project a new team of professionals have developed both within schools and across schools who are now capable reflective practitioners, able to analyse, research and develop new understandings about the role and value of creative learning in their settings. A new community has developed through the twilight meetings and this has been further developed with some of the original schools through a small Creative Partnerships project which is extending understandings further.

## **8. Challenges for the future**

### *Strategic planning (to become a learning organisation):*

Without doubt the sites of greatest growth in this project are ones where the senior managers, typically head teachers have positioned and responded to the project to consolidate and develop its impact. Hargreaves (1998) suggests that the priority for schools at present is learning how to be a learning organisation, investigating and developing the capital it has in its people. This requires 'a school culture which holds that all teachers are potentially creative in what they do', that they 'protect idea generation, select, shape, cultivate and disseminate new knowledge'. This is what one advisory teacher called

'positive learning environment which is whole school and were learnability rather than ability language is used, where choice is the norm, where risk taking is encouraged supported and demonstrated'

More work needs to be done involving the whole curriculum and creativity.

### *Professional development:*

It follows on then that there is a need for greater investment in professional development in these fields. This is the single strongest message from the data to date. Repeatedly we have heard about the unanticipated sense of value of the professional development aspect of the project as a result of being able to observe, test and reflect with peers, with advisory teachers and with artists.

### *Sharing practice*

The demands upon all involved have limited the extent to which practice has been shared. This requires some further attention. Hargreaves again suggests whilst generalised practice sharing can have limited value, 'situated adaptation' of ideas – where practice is shared, debated and reconstructed as it might apply to a different context is what makes sharing practice valuable.

### *Reflective tools*

A few teachers have reported that developing children's reflexivity about their learning is impacting across the curriculum. They have observed children listening more and thinking more. Julian Sefton-Green (2000) describes this as the translation effect where 'moving across domains helps the learner become more explicit about the making process'. However as we noted earlier there is scope for developing a wider range of

reflective tools and modelling ways of notating to be more inclusive and 'including ... honest and fair use of the non-verbal in our evaluative methods.'

For teachers the reflective teacher culture also warrants further support.

#### *Artists & teachers*

Most schools saw artists as working in very different ways to advisory teachers - a key factor being their different creative processes and relationship to the formal curriculum. These are common findings in the research in this field (Dust & Sharp 1990 etc.). The extent to which such differences were valued, negotiated and maximised for the purpose of the project varied. This appears to have been dependant upon how the relationship between advisory teacher, artist and the class teacher grew. This area of work demands a 'collaborative model' which 'holds within it the encouragement of multiple perspectives' (Craft & Gardner 2005) and would be a strong development of work with artists by teachers. Whether this learning curve might have been less steep (or less painful) with more professional investment in developing understandings with the artists in advance is worth further consideration.

#### *Creativity & the arts vs whole curriculum*

Responses were divided 50/50 between those who considered that creative processes are best developed through the arts and those who felt it might have been preferable to look at creativity in other subjects too. This project might easily extend practices across the curriculum and explore the ways in which creative learning can feed different disciplines.

## **9. Conclusions**

*Teaching Creatively; Teaching for Creativity* was a challenging initiative that sought to make an impact on the development of creativity in primary schools. Our evaluation suggests that, overall, the project met its objectives. Teachers showed improved flexibility in their planning, were more prepared to take risks and to engage in more dialogic learning relationships with their pupils. Teachers were less focussed on feeling the need to control learning outcomes. Teachers and pupils had both improved their arts skills.

The use of teamwork was successful for both the advisory teachers, advisers and artists, and also the teachers. This method allowed valuable exploration of ideas.

Artists found the experience very valuable and in some cases had changed their own practice.

The positive effects on pupils were of several kinds. They saw themselves as more confident and also more competent as learners, more self-directed. The less hierarchal approach aided this development. Parents were overwhelmingly positive.

The project also had a wider impact on the schools, helping to develop a whole school learning culture.

The project drew upon the existing strengths within the Solihull LA with respect to creative learning and benefited from the sizeable core team. The challenge now is to sustain the essence of this initiative: the evidence suggests that schools are both keen to do this and consider it feasible.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> One such initiative, proposed by the reports recommendations is QCA's Creativity *Find it Promote it!* project which offered definitions of creativity, how to identify, foster and extend it across the curriculum. Another is Creative Partnerships – a national creative learning action-research programme which partners creative and cultural organisations with schools to develop ways in which the capacity of each partner can be developed by the other to the combined purpose of creativity permeating a whole school / whole organisation. This project targets areas of deprivation in 36 sites nationwide. There are many similarities between the Solihull project and this particular initiative.

<sup>2</sup> MindKind is a training organisation focused upon developing thinking and learning skills. Solihull schools' training has been through Mark Haward.

<sup>3</sup> More than 20 schools (a third of all Solihull primaries) expressed a serious interest following a presentation to ascertain interest at the head teacher's conference in January 2003 although not all had capacity to take it on in the required timescale. 14 started the project and 13 completed.

<sup>4</sup> One advisory teacher spoke of the arts as 'guardians of creative processes'.

<sup>5</sup> The role of the TCP was to

- ensure a coherent and consistent approach to the development and delivery of the project
- support the school in transferring aspects of creativity across the curriculum to ensure whole school development
- liaise with the head teacher, school project coordinators and subject specialist, the monitoring inspector and the artists
- facilitate and support networks within the project to ensure the sharing of best practice
- undertake appropriate administration including seeking and circulating articles of interest
- provide guidance on support packages, including advising the best use of advisory teacher time; to support evaluation strategies

<sup>6</sup> Each section of the 'Core Curriculum for Norway' is as aspect of the 'human being' to be nurtured. Areas include 'spiritual ... creative ... working ... liberally –educated ... social, environmentally aware ... integrated human being'.

<sup>7</sup> Taken from key note speech by Carlina Rinaldi at Reggio Emilia March 2005

<sup>8</sup> This is much like the Reggio model where significant attention is given to children's work in progress. Work in progress is recorded on a personal CD and used to support a learning dialogue between pedagogues, atelieristes and parents