



Are we really serious about creativity?

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Creativity is an essential human attribute which should lie at the heart of learning.

The ability to face uncertainty and respond to complex challenges with energy, enthusiasm, imagination and resourcefulness has never been more important. We believe that children and young people have a right to experience and develop their own creativity – becoming proactive, creative players in the world.

Through the ‘Creativity Matters’ series we are hoping to stimulate a conversation about how we can transform the experiences which children and young people have in their schools and communities to make this right a reality.

We want to open up a discussion about some key questions which have emerged from our work in promoting creative teaching and learning. All of the issues will draw on CapeUK’s experience in this field. Some of the issues will be provocative - challenging prevailing assumptions; others will raise questions in a more tentative way. However, all are intended as a stimulus to further debate and discussion in order to grow our understanding of children and young people, learning and creativity.

If you would like to carry on the conversation please contact us at: creativitymatters@capeuk.org

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about creativity?**

Introduction

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Jot down your thoughts in the margin here...

Over the last few years there has been a huge upsurge of interest in creativity and learning. Changes that have flowed from the pivotal report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) have given permission for schools to move creativity centre stage.¹ In fact, so many articles, books, reviews, guides and pamphlets have been published on creativity that you might feel there is little room for yet another. But the current debate about what the curriculum of the future should look like, which has been generated by the QCA, offers an opportunity which is too good to miss: namely, the chance to bring about a step-change in the design of the curriculum and the place of creativity within it.²

In the recently published report, A Curriculum for the Future - Subjects Consider the Challenge, nearly all of the curriculum areas consulted refer to the need for creativity. The statements from the field of science and maths are as powerful as those from English and the arts. It seems that the argument for creating space for young people's creativity is finally being won. But, if there is so much agreement on the importance of creativity, why is it not yet a reality in the daily educational experience of every child and young person? What are some of the challenges and barriers and what do we need to consider in the transformation process?

¹ All Our Futures: creativity, culture and education, Report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999

² Information about Futures: meeting the challenge can be found on the QCA website, www.qca.org.uk

Summary

In this paper we draw on our experience of supporting schools to develop creativity in teaching and learning over a seven-year period and explore a number of the questions, issues and dilemmas which have emerged from this work.

- Is the conflation of the arts with creativity in much of the rhetoric at policy level problematic?
- Is there a genuine commitment at policy level to pursue creativity across the curriculum, or are we promoting a sanitised version of creativity which takes the risk and challenge out of the creative process?
- How can we resolve the conflict between the espousal of creativity and an educational culture which prizes performativity; between a valuing of complex processes and the current system's emphasis on easily measured outcomes?
- Assessment for learning requires the learner to be aware of the skills, competences or aptitudes that they are seeking to learn. Do creative programmes in schools need to become more explicit about their purpose and the capacities they are seeking to develop? Is it possible to do this without reducing creativity to a tick-box list?
- The move away from a knowledge-based curriculum towards one which values the development of creative capacities in young people is a paradigm shift, the scale of which is often underestimated. How can teachers be supported to work through this change?

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What do we mean by **creativity**?

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The finely crafted definition developed in *All Our Futures* is now the most commonly used and a useful reference point. It suggests that creativity is:

Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value.

The definition covers both process and product, implies the active involvement of the learner, and alludes to the moral issues involved in the purposes of creativity.

But as soon as we begin to move beyond this broad level of definition, we enter difficult terrain. If we are seeking to develop creative young people, why don't we simply do what a human resource specialist would do to identify the key capacities required to fulfil a specific role? For example, the Hay McBer approach would identify a number of very creative people, analyse their behaviour and seek to construct from that a typology of creativity

which would then enable others to develop those same skills and aptitudes. The difficulty of applying this approach to creativity becomes apparent when we consider a few of the traits we might associate with creative people, many of which are antisocial and contradictory:

- Apparently vague and daydreaming/obsessive and focussed to the extent of excluding other considerations
- Generous/selfish
- Collaborative/solitary
- Compulsive and speedy/intermittently slow and reflective

We can see that not all of the above qualities are generally considered positive and that a school full of individuals manifesting all of them would not be an easy or desirable environment. However, if we don't recognise this complexity, we risk sanitising creativity to the extent that it becomes just another set of superficial skills, as opposed to a deep capacity for transformational thought and action.

Over the last three years the QCA has attempted to develop a set of indicators of creativity to support teachers working with children and young people. Taking its cue from the NACCCE definition cited above, the QCA identifies five broad behaviours that children demonstrate when they are being creative.³

They are:

- Questioning and challenging
- Making connections and seeing relationships
- Envisaging what might be
- Exploring ideas, keeping options open
- Reflecting critically on ideas, actions and outcomes

This is helpful and serves as a useful starting point, but by focussing attention only on the acceptable face of creativity, do we risk weakening the radical features that lie at its core?

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³ See *Creativity: find it, promote it*, www.qca.org.uk

Does involvement in an arts project enable young people to **develop their creative capacities**?

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The rhetoric of creativity and learning is ambitious. It talks of preparing young people for an unknowable future, equipping them with the skills to face uncertainty, handle risk, make complex ethical decisions, generate new ideas, approach challenges with an enquiring mind - and all this within a global context. These are generic capacities, not specific to any particular curriculum area, and yet much of what happens in schools under the banner of creativity continues to be perceived as located within the arts.

Many government policy statements conflate creativity with the arts. The underlying assumption appears to be that involvement in arts programmes will, by some process of osmosis, enable children to develop their creative capacities. But this is not necessarily the case. For a start, we know that some activities may look creative, but in reality give the child or young person limited opportunity to exercise their own creativity. You don't keep fit by watching the marathon on television.

All too often pupils are directed in their work, told where to move on the stage, led through a creative process step by step and given very limited parameters within which to work. This doesn't mean that copying, imitating and learning from others and the hard slog of building skills or working within a tight brief is not part of the creative process. They are. But they are only part. We are not likely to succeed in developing young people who have the confidence to face the unknown and take risks by fostering only arts-based projects that look good, impress parents and may even engage the wider community, but do not give the pupils the space to explore ideas, rise to a challenge and exercise their own decision-making skills. Consider the following projects:

A school has funding to work with an artist. The purpose of the project is to produce a mural on a desolate part of the school premises. The project involves a group of pupils who work with the artist after school hours. The pupils formulate ideas and try

out some designs, but mainly in the form of small-scale sketches and models. The headteacher wants a good end-product and is not confident that, left to their own devices, the pupils will create something of sufficient quality. In the end, the artist designs and paints the mural. The final mural does indeed look attractive and brightens up an area of the school, but the extent to which the pupils have been involved in a creative process or 'own' the final product is limited. All the hard work, resilience and risk involved in finalising the ideas and placing them in the public arena were contributed by the artist.

A school has an in-house radio station and has been broadcasting to its own staff and pupils for a number of years. The school gets a grant which will enable broadcasting within a six mile radius for a month. The decision is made to broadcast from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., and, as it's simply not possible for a teacher to supervise all the time, it's decided that responsibility for programming and broadcasting will lie with the young people. There's a well established GCSE Media Studies course and the pupils from this group will take the lead. The headteacher is taking a risk in leaving decisions about content and stories to the pupils. They have to sort out the programmes, make decisions about quality,

depth and variety and cope with all the deadlines and other challenges involved in running a radio station. In three years of broadcasting, there has never been an occasion when the young people have betrayed the school's trust.

If we believe that the second of these processes is more likely to develop young people's creative capacities than the first, it poses quite a challenge to issues of authority and control within the leadership and management of schools. The contained creative project has limited potential for bringing about change but imaginative leadership of time and resources and risk taking can lead to a far richer set of opportunities for young people.

When children and young people are proactively involved in the shaping, making designing and decision making process the arts can provide an environment and context in which the creative capacities of young people grow and develop. We know that the best arts practice does this in profound ways. Can this be achieved in other curriculum areas?

Yes, but we need to open up genuine creative processes rather than simply using the arts to illuminate or enliven a curriculum area. This may lead to a creative and inspirational teaching process, which makes learning of the

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particular topic more memorable, but it is unlikely to lead the children and young people to exercise creativity within a particular domain. So while applying drama to a science topic or exploring an historical concept through dance may well enliven the teaching it is unlikely to develop the skills of a creative scientist, or historian. A creative scientist observes, classifies, hypothesises, experiments; a creative historian interprets events, drawing conclusions from evidence and recognises patterns in events. In order to introduce children and young people to these processes, we need to shape experiences which enable them to explore these processes in stimulating and real contexts.

The difficulty of **mixed messages** in the 'real world'

CapeUK's experience in schools suggests that there is still a tension between the message coming from government and the reality of what teachers and headteachers feel free to do in school. A subject-based national curriculum, a testing régime which focuses on subject knowledge and league tables which arguably grade schools according to their ability to teach to the tests, all run counter to the development of a climate which is genuinely conducive to creativity. Can we maintain and improve standards in the established sense of achieving grades while at the same time transforming schools into places that nurture young people's creativity? Yes, we firmly believe we can.

To achieve this transformation, however, there needs to be a shift in the balance of what is valued in schools, a shift in favour of valuing that which cannot be easily measured. It is vital that the messages are consistent: otherwise teachers will continue to feel that they are either performing a precarious balancing act or

covering their backs. Creativity needs to be valued in its own right rather than as a conduit to higher attainment in curriculum areas.

The dilemma teachers face is exemplified by the experience of an action research project in a primary school in Leeds:

Jane is a very experienced and successful primary school teacher who has worked for the past twenty years in a school with a long tradition of investing in the arts. The school has achieved the Artsmark gold standard and Jane has been completely committed to this. Passionate about her own development, Jane makes time in her busy life as a teacher to join in local amateur dramatic productions and to take part in regular workshops run by an exploratory contemporary dance group. As part of the Creativity Action Research Awards scheme (CARA), Jane collaborated with a member of the Northern Ballet Theatre Learning and Access Department to develop and research

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a creative learning programme with year 3 and 4 pupils.⁴ They set out to explore whether creating a dance performance with a professional dancer and musician would inspire children to write more fluently.

The children worked with the creative team once a week for two hours over a six week period, culminating in a full day's workshop and two performances to parents and fellow pupils. The creative process was shaped by the children in response to a story by Philip Pullman, 'The Fireworkmaker's Daughter'. The children came up with the ideas for the performance, worked in teams, made choices about which ideas to use and eagerly kept their diary reflections on their work. This was the main way in which children and their creative partners communicated between sessions. With a purpose to their writing, the children were eager at every session to record their thoughts and feelings. They developed their vocabulary and ability to empathise with the characters. There was none of the usual "What should I write Miss?". And yet when the teachers came to analyse the attainment of the pupils in their formal written assessment, and there appeared to be no evidence of improvement in their writing, Jane's disappointment was tangible. She felt, in some way, that the project had failed.

⁴ Information about this Creative Partnerships initiative can be found on the website www.creative-partnerships.com CapeUK led and managed the programme.

Even in a school with a strong commitment to creativity, preoccupation with league tables and SATs scores as the prime manifestation of success can make it difficult to recognise and value forms of learning which are not subject to assessment in the same way: for example, passion, enthusiasm, motivation, tenacity, empathy, making connections between information from a range of sources, engagement, resilience, building on others' ideas, negotiating with others, and learning to work towards challenges, face disappointment, collaborate with others, take risk and work towards tight deadlines. This creativity can be sidelined in teaching which prioritises the test. It's an inspired school, with a brave headteacher, which keeps the test in its proper place and maintains a focus on the values and practical processes of teaching for creativity. The difficulty is that we often have to justify involvement in creative activities by improved test scores or performance in higher status areas. Creativity itself should be seen as a high value outcome.

The CARA programme provides a further example of how mixed policy messages affect what is seen as possible. Launched in September 2004 as an opportunity for partnerships between teachers and creative practitioners to carry out collaborative action research, CARA's focus was the development

of creativity in children and young people. Its brief was broad, ambitious and deliberately not tied to targets.

The scheme gave each partnership a grant of £4,500 to fund time for activity and reflection and the writing-up of research. It also offered the support of a mentor and a series of professional development workshops over an eight month period. Partly modelled on the Best Practice Research Scholarships (BPRS), the scheme attracted a great deal of interest from teachers and creative practitioners.⁵ There is evidently no lack of commitment to creativity. What was interesting for the purposes of this argument, however, was the priority given by applicants to raising attainment in literacy or in one of the core subjects, even when given 'permission' by the terms of the CARA award to focus on other dimensions of pupils' creativity.

Of the 104 CARA projects over 61% initially focussed on creativity as a means of enhancing learning in discrete areas of the curriculum. In other words, creativity was used instrumentally in the teaching of another subject. Few partnerships chose to concentrate on the development of creative capacities for their own sake, without seeking to demonstrate that this would lead to improved attainment in, for example, literacy, numeracy, ICT, history or science.

So what was seen as possible was constrained by the dominant message within our education system that a school's single most important goal is the achievement of high test scores and the message that we only value what we can measure. Support, guidance and affirmation from mentors and others was required before the permission which was being granted to experiment was actually believed. Creativity itself should be seen as a high value outcome rather than being justified by high test scores or performance

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⁵ Best Practice Research Scholarships of £2,500 were available to classroom teachers to engage in supported, school focussed research. Sponsored by the DfES the scheme is no longer in operation.

The thorny issue of **assessment**

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While teaching to the test can be a barrier to the development of creativity, we do need to grasp the thorny issue of assessment in creativity for two reasons. First, there is compelling evidence⁶ that formative assessment is a key ingredient for encouraging and supporting learning. This is surely as true in relation to creativity as any other aspect of learning. If we do not have frames to explore the development of creativity with pupils, are we supporting them as effectively as we should to develop their creative capacities?

Second, many teachers strongly resist the notion of assessing creativity, fearing that it will inevitably entail mechanistic tests and scores and undermine the very foundations of the creative process. For this reason, any 'checklist for creativity' would undoubtedly be contentious. However, if we are investing time in developing young people's creativity, but have no way of judging whether there has been progression, there is a difficulty. The

challenge is to observe children's progress in creativity in ways which do not reduce the process to an examination of a disconnected set of behaviours, for such an approach would do little justice to the interconnected web of complex processes involved in creative endeavour.

Creativity is an advanced form of learning that involves a finely tuned orchestra of mental attitudes and capabilities playing together in complicated rhythms. Creativity is learning at its deepest and most powerful. It builds on mastery of all the basic skills and habits of more familiar kinds of learning. Creativity is not easy. It is not a matter of a few hints and tips and off we go. It is often slow and sometimes agonising. Creativity is not one thing. It is not a unitary faculty that can be trained or cultivated by itself.⁷

⁶ Inside the Black Box
Paul Black and Dylan
Williams Kings College
London Nelson

⁷ Creativity: a guide for the
advanced learner (and
Teacher). Adapted from
an article in National
Association of Head
Teachers' Leadership Papers
2003 Guy Claxton

Resistance to notions of assessment in this field perhaps have more to do with teachers' desire to keep a place in the curriculum which is free for self-expression and free from measurement - a safe space for experimentation. But even if we look at this from the context of arts practice, this is based on a notion of creativity which bears little relation to the practice of visual or performing artists or other creative practitioners. Arts practice involves a constant process of self-reflection, review and critique, which may not be laid out in papers and reports, but is essentially the same classic quality improvement cycle of 'plan - do - review - improve' familiar to all teachers. If we are supporting young people to be creative, then we should not shy away from the rigour of reflection and assessment.

The resistance may also be rooted in the idea that assessment necessarily means testing. If we place this discussion in the context of assessment for learning, then the importance of pupils having a frame for considering the development of their creativity becomes more useful. But here we face a challenge.

The best principles of assessment for learning suggest that children need to understand what it is they are supposed to be learning or what skills, capacities and aptitudes they are supposed to be developing and nurturing. The

teacher or facilitator can then give feedback which enables the learner to identify areas for change or development. However, our experience of the CARA programme shows that, even with encouragement, awardees were reluctant to use the carefully developed and helpful criteria for observing creativity in the QCA's 'Creativity: find it, promote it'. We would need to carry out more analysis of why this was the case. It may be a simple reflection of the fact that most teachers are still working on their own with a class of pupils and in this context it is almost impossible to make detailed observations on the behaviour and development of an individual child.

The finding certainly reinforces our experience in other programmes that observing and supporting the development of capacities or competences in young people requires a significant conceptual shift from an approach to teaching and learning which has been focussed on knowledge acquisition.

A number of projects and programmes are exploring models which may prove useful. The Royal Society of Arts 'Opening Minds' programme is looking at approaches to a competence-based curriculum; CapeUK has worked within Open College accreditation processes to enable young people to gain accreditation in problem solving and working with others through engagement with

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demanding creative projects; Manchester LA is developing an ME (Manchester Entitlement) curriculum which maps the capabilities that all young people in Manchester schools should have an opportunity to develop, including empathy and creativity, negotiating challenges and problems, managing feelings, being self aware, motivating ourselves and using social skills; the ELLI⁸ (Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory) project at Bristol University, which has been analysing what makes an effective learner for several years, sees creativity as one of the seven dimensions of learning. However, returning to the metaphor for creativity which Guy Claxton uses of the 'finely tuned orchestra of mental attitudes and capabilities playing together', the challenge that we face is that simply adding up the results of sectional rehearsals does not give us an assessment of the full orchestral performance.

Complex as it may be to determine the dimensions of effective learning, the bigger challenge comes when we seek to put these ideas into practice in the reality of a climate in which success is measured by the quantity and accuracy of knowledge that a young person can retain, rather than by the demonstration of a whole set of other, less tangible aptitudes.

⁸ *Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory*. Bristol University
www.ellionline.co.uk

Supporting teachers to work in a new way

If teachers are to shift the focus of their teaching practice from a knowledge-based curriculum to one which emphasises competences or capabilities, they need time and safe places in which to absorb and explore the implications of change. Otherwise, there is a danger that the competences we are trying to develop simply become another aspect of knowledge or 'ground to be covered' in the teaching process. **Teaching for creativity requires a reshaping of the teaching and learning experience which allows for longer spaces of time to enable greater exploration; encourages pupils to make links across seemingly disparate forms of knowledge; is based on enquiry; is often a response to a challenge which is meaningful and of value to the young people, rather than a transfer of knowledge; and which exercises young people's skills in purposeful environments.**

Although many primary schools are using the permission of 'Excellence and Enjoyment' to make real explorations in this field, what Tim

Brighouse describes as the 'monotonous metronomic nature of the timetabled curriculum'⁹ in most secondary schools remains largely unaltered. Each day is broken into subject areas, which are led by teachers who teach their specialist skill and have limited opportunity to work over a long period of time on a specific programme or challenge.

If we are expecting teachers in secondary schools to move away from this model of teaching, we have to invest in them and give them time and space to feel confident with a very different approach to teaching. You can't read about creativity in the manual and then instantly make it happen in the classroom. Our experience suggests that teachers need to have time to immerse themselves in a creative process in order to understand and internalise what it is that they are trying to develop in young people. It is by sharing and exploring processes with other teachers rather than by reading about creative teaching and learning styles that they will learn to change

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⁹ Accidents Can Happen
Tim Brighouse Paper of QCA
Futures website
www.qca.org.uk/futures

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Yet this investment in teacher development represents another challenge, for the very pressures of the timetable and other demands in the school day mean that teachers are often reluctant to spend time away from working with pupils. Our experience of the CARA programme has been instructive in this respect. Although the programme allowed time for reflection, most participants chose to devote the bulk of their time to working directly with pupils, and teachers had to be encouraged (in some cases directed!) to take time away from direct delivery.

As we seek to make radical changes in teaching and learning styles, teachers need dedicated time and space in which to develop their professional practice. We need to invest in teachers' professional development to support this process of change.

Teachers and creative practitioners working in schools know that the best creative programmes can offer a rich mix of experiences and nurture creative capabilities in pupils within and across all areas of the curriculum. But is there a risk that the intense interest in creativity heralded by the NACCCE report five years ago will soon give way to something else, as the QCA's big debate about the future of the National Curriculum gets underway? Let's hope not, because the work

currently taking place up and down the country under a variety of titles and auspices - Creative Partnerships, CapeUK, CARA, Creative Contexts, Artists in Schools - has an enormous contribution to make to this discourse.

Perhaps the term 'creativity' is too closely associated with the arts for it to be useful as the generic term in describing the processes, experiences and opportunities which should lie at the heart of the curriculum. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what we call the kind of learning we advocate. **What does matter is that we seize the opportunity now within our grasp to re-shape the curriculum for the future, and ensure that the capacities which make us human and enable us to face the unknown are at the centre of the stage. We need to make sure that teachers are supported and given time and space in which to consider and explore these changes and that we listen and genuinely open up to children and young people. Only then will we be able to devise experiences which enable them, through learning and living, to develop their capacity to think, play, imagine, dream, design, and create a better world.**

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About CapeUK

CapeUK is an incubator for the development of ideas and practice in creativity and learning. A research and development agency our focus is children and young people and those organisations and individuals who work with them.

We are both a research and a practical organisation - our approaches are firmly rooted in experience.

- We try out ideas
- We make meaning
- We support change processes
- We influence policy and strategy

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Further Reading

CapeUK Creativity Matters include:

- Creativity Matters **01 Creativity**
- Creativity Matters **02 Social Inclusion**
- Creativity Matters **03 Science**

To access these documents
as PDF files go to: www.capeuk.org

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