

HMCI speech for Creative Partnerships National Conference
Creativity in schools: what inspection tells us
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I was pleased to be asked to contribute to your first national conference. Ofsted's strength lies in its inspection evidence, and I have been asked to draw on this and report on what inspection tells us about creativity in schools. Most of what I shall say comes from a range of inspection reports published over the past two or three years. Principally, I shall draw on our recent report on Creative Partnerships, but others contribute to the theme: Improving City Schools – how the arts can help; the Primary National Strategy; The Key Stage 4 Curriculum: Increased Flexibility; and "Expecting the Unexpected". We also have evidence from our school inspection programme.

As you know, Ofsted has recently published a report: **Creative Partnerships: initiative and impact**. It is a short survey of just six areas of the country, but it contains a clear reminder of the important part creativity has to play if pupils are to enjoy and achieve to the full and contribute to the economy and society.

I also found it interesting to see what school inspection reports say about the progress made by schools in developing the creativity of learners. Of the 6000 school inspection reports published between September 2005 and July 2006, a good number made clear and positive references to creativity and some to the impact of Creative Partnerships programmes.

School inspection reports where positive comments were made about creativity, repeatedly stress:

- a successful curriculum is often linked to creative curriculum design that promotes links between subjects
- there are opportunities for learners to pursue their creativity through periods of unbroken time during creativity days and weeks
- creativity is associated with developing problem solving skills
- and the arts and ICT are often linked to the development of creativity.

Perhaps the lines from the reports I have recently read that captured my interest the most were those about the injection of excitement into lessons; indeed, the word “magic” was used in one report. Unlocking creativity motivates children. More than that, it often motivates children who respond negatively to what they perceive as being boring, mundane or just plain irrelevant. Little wonder, for example, that we have found examples of where creativity in schools in difficult circumstances has helped a school turn the corner.

A 2003 ofsted report, **Improving City Schools: how the arts can help**, emphasised just this point. It describes schools in challenging circumstances where pupils, teachers and school leaders were starting to build their capacity to improve through creative achievements. I guess we all know schools where music, or art, or drama have caught the imagination of young people in ways that have had spin-offs across the curriculum; and indeed across their lives.

The other side of the coin, of course, is also reported. A trawl through inspection reports gives us some idea of the issues when creative development is inadequate.

The negative aspect that caught my eye was an unwillingness to take risks. This was a theme in our 2005 report on **the Primary National Strategy. An evaluation of its impact in primary schools.**

In most cases, the report concludes, schools are reluctant to make wholesale changes when looking at fresh ways of introducing creativity. This is particularly true where current practice is already seen to be supporting high achievement in English and mathematics. Schools are properly nervous about doing anything that may undermine their hard won gains in literacy and numeracy. But the best schools I have seen harness creativity across all that they do and bring it to bear on how they tackle literacy and numeracy as well as the wider curriculum.

Before I go further, let me reflect for a moment on what we mean by "creativity". A useful contribution to this matter of definition can be found in the 'creativity prompts' used by inspectors in our recent survey and annexed to the report. These will, I hope, help all involved with Creative Partnerships programmes to evaluate the extent of learners' creative development. For example, the prompts challenge us to evaluate the extent to which pupils can 'push the boundaries of materials, ideas and processes' and demonstrate their individuality by expressing a unique combination of 'feelings, influences and aspirations'.

It is in this context that our inspectors have recently been on the road with a specific focus on creativity, building on our report of 2003. That report, '**Expecting the Unexpected**' provides schools with a checklist to help evaluate their success in developing the conditions for creativity. It also contains a main finding that "schools

which promote creativity effectively are outward-looking, welcoming the perspectives that external agencies and individuals bring to them”.

Our recent report found that Creative Partnerships programmes are capable of making a distinctive contribution to the work of schools. I say “capable of making”, because inspectors were directed to good practice by the national team. We know that quality is not yet consistent across all areas that have developed Creative Partnerships. However, we identified such clear gains for learners that we have recommended the extension of opportunities for young people to work with a creative practitioner.

If the gains from this project are to be enduring, it has to help teachers think about creativity in their day to day working. One very important contribution of Creative Partnerships has been in the distinction made between creative teaching and teaching for creativity. Our emphasis is very firmly on the latter: teaching for creativity.

Indeed, Ofsted’s current framework for inspection emphasises the importance of establishing the impact of teaching on learning. This is central to the approach taken by all Ofsted inspectors. Of course, I acknowledge that creative teaching can lead to very positive learning experiences for young people, but as we said in our 2004 report **Expecting the Unexpected**, there are occasions when “a display of artistry can inhibit pupils’ creativity”. We may all recall lessons – performances, really – where an extrovert teacher has entertained and caught the interest of the pupils, but where on sober reflection we have realised that nothing has been learned.

Teaching for creativity demands both skills in teaching and expert subject knowledge. Teachers can enhance their subject knowledge by working with creative practitioners,

and the practitioners can gain in their approaches to learning from working alongside teachers. But if we are to raise the quality of this interaction to create a synergy between educators and experts there is also a need for training. So for example, highly skilled creative practitioners may be experienced writers, designers, entrepreneurs, performers, but may lack the ability to share their skills effectively with young people. One of the main findings of our report is the importance of good quality training for creative practitioners so that their expertise can be unlocked for the benefit of pupils.

Good quality training for creative practitioners also includes an understanding of educational settings in order to function effectively in them. This includes valuing the role of teachers and support staff and complementing existing relationships. It is also about recognising the priorities that schools are tackling. There is little value in imposed projects that have no lasting impact due to a lack of understanding of the context. Where the context is well understood, there are clear gains.

You will recall that Creative Partnerships was initially set up in areas of deprivation in order to help more schools accelerate improvement. Our recent report refers to the “changed attitudes and behaviours” that represented significant progress in some of the schools visited. In those schools inspectors found “teachers who previously lacked belief in their own creativity and ability to inspire creativity in others, and pupils who were previously unconvinced by familiar approaches to learning” or indeed of the value of education”.

Our reports are unequivocal. Creative Partnerships can help schools to tackle underachievement. One approach which we saw working effectively was the

involvement of young people in Creative Partnerships programmes that took them outside the school. At best, creative practitioners distinguished themselves through their ability to fascinate and inspire young people. They showed pupils what creativity means in the world beyond school, including the workplace.

We found that where learners work directly in the creative industries the impact is greater than where they have not had this experience. A finding of our report, therefore, is that all learners need to increase their knowledge and understanding about the work of creative practitioners outside school.

How can we begin to move towards such an ambitious goal? As a starting point our report recommends that creative industries and practitioners should increase opportunities for learners and their teachers to work directly in the creative industries to develop the best practice seen.

This presents a considerable challenge. In Ofsted's 2005 report on **Specialist Schools**, work placements in the creative industries were reported as a weakness even in specialist arts colleges. The creative industries provide a fast developing range of opportunities that most parents and indeed teachers are unlikely to have experienced for themselves. The pace of change in the creative industries emphasises the need for learners to develop flexible skills that enable them to adapt to future opportunities. These are significant challenges.

However, some answers are emerging. For example, in some specialist secondary schools, innovative and effective developments are occurring through the increased flexibility programme. These are beginning to provide pupils with greater choice, reflecting their abilities, interests and aptitudes. Ofsted reported on this in 2005 in a

report called **The Key Stage 4 Curriculum: Increased Flexibility**. This report identified improving links between schools, colleges and work-based training organisations. But if links are to continue to develop, it is important that the creative industries can see gains from their investment of expertise and time. Creative industries need to be convinced about the adaptability of learners involved in Creative Partnerships. There can, of course, be no better demonstration of the benefits than young people themselves showing that they can make a genuine contribution to a fast moving scene.

Our report refers to the effectiveness of middle managers who have assumed the role of 'creative ambassadors' in schools. Learners, too, need to see themselves as 'creative ambassadors'. Their contribution to the creative industries in these early programmes is likely to be a factor in determining the range and quality of opportunities open to others in the future. The signs are good; characteristics such as improvisation, risk-taking and resilience that creative people often display were qualities shown by most learners in the Creative Partnerships programmes visited. So far I have talked mainly about creative outcomes, but I would also like to draw your attention to other wider benefits of involvement in Creative Partnerships programmes. I am thinking about gains in learners' literacy, numeracy and ICT as well as good personal and social skills that will contribute to their wider achievements and future economic well-being.

Convincing evidence was also provided in all Creative Partnerships areas that we inspected about the contribution of the programmes to the Every Child Matters outcomes. The vast majority of pupils directly involved enjoyed their education in and

through Creative Partnerships; good behaviour, cooperation, enthusiasm and pride were common outcomes. Important skills were consistently improved, for example, self-confidence, team working, and an ability to show enterprise and handle change. Of course, the extent to which this represents significant progress specifically because of Creative Partnerships remains unclear. The best schools embrace many new opportunities and initiatives and together these make a significant difference. Our report therefore highlights the need to track the progress of the individuals involved if we are to make a more certain link between cause and effect.

One thing we can be more certain of is that programmes need to be carefully tailored to individual needs. As we said in the report, in planning the programmes, pupils' starting points were insufficiently questioned and sometimes, particularly in arts subjects, creativity was assumed when it was not necessarily present. If creativity is rooted in valuing difference and diversity the unique starting points of different learners should be recognised and built upon through a more personalised approach.

In summary, the programmes have resulted in both specific and general benefits.

But I would also like to draw your attention to some of the misconceptions raised by the survey.

Firstly, simply providing time for learners to develop their creativity is inadequate without the necessary stimulus, challenge and intervention. Secondly, involvement in the arts does not inevitably result in creativity if the necessary focus on originality, value and quality is lacking. Thirdly, although 'single events' might promote instances of creativity, this is insufficient in itself. Our report showed that generally pupils were unable to transfer the skills learned in Creative Partnerships programmes to initiate

creative opportunities in other aspects of their work. This transferability will only come with consistent immersion and application. And fourthly, being a creative practitioner is insufficient justification for working with learners without the skills to inspire, communicate and evaluate.

One of Ofsted's roles is to disseminate good practice. But of course the real impetus must rest with schools to develop and celebrate creativity. It is not always easy to 'capture creativity' during inspection. Inspectors know that creativity is not easy to 'switch on' to coincide with a particular lesson observation. Creative thinking does not instantly lead to an outcome or if it does, it will not necessarily be an outcome that immediately appears better than previously achieved.

However, we will all have shared experiences in schools when creative achievements have taken teachers and other learners by surprise, when previously undiscovered qualities of individuals are revealed for the first time. That sense of sharing a creative moment might also involve collaboration. Perhaps you have experienced a powerful performance or exhibition of work that creates a special ethos that continues well beyond the event and changes not only the aspirations and performance of learners but those of parents, teachers, support staff and school leaders?

Self-evaluation – and we are seeing this increasingly embedded in schools - provides opportunities for schools and external agencies to share approaches and achievements that inspectors might not see during the inspection visit itself.

Clearly, there are challenges both for those already involved with Creative Partnerships and for those who remain unconvinced or uninformed about what they

are missing. The recommendations of the report set clear challenges for Creative Partnerships, schools, creative individuals and industries, and local authorities.

As well as talking about our inspection evidence, I was asked to emphasise why we should value creativity in schools. Much of what I have said implies why creativity should be valued. However, let me finish by addressing this point very directly. We all know from experience that being creative is exciting and it stimulates, motivates, encourages and enables us to go further than we may individually or collectively have dared to go before. Creative experiences provide fresh insights into the familiar and renewed confidence to explore the unfamiliar. It is infectious; it draws others in and encourages them to be creative as well. It gives rise to new ideas, deep thinking and reflection and it enables people to achieve things they had not anticipated. It encourages people to work together, get to understand each other better, overcome stereotypes and develop as complete people. Creativity has the potential to make schools and society more harmonious as well as more successful. We should value creativity for itself and also as a way of celebrating difference, embracing diversity and creating more cohesive communities.

And so I should like to leave you a definition of creativity I had not come across before preparing for this speech. It is the definition used by NESTA, the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts. According to NESTA, creativity is "Seeing what no one else has seen, thinking what no one else has thought and doing what no one else has dared." A wonderful reason for valuing creativity in our schools.

References

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