



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

CREATIVITY COLLABORATIVES

The Elliot Foundation Academy Trust
West Midlands

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Dr Victoria Kinsella



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INTRODUCTION

The Elliot Foundation Academy Trust Creativity Collaborative in the West Midlands explored the following question:

How can empowering teachers to develop creative pedagogies facilitate the environment in which learners are enabled to flourish and fulfil their creative potential?

The three-year longitudinal project investigated the impact of integrating creative teaching practices and the establishment of effective collaborative models between schools' and creative practitioners, with the goal of enhancing creative teaching and learning. This report documents findings from a diverse group of stakeholders, including learners, teachers, creative practitioners, and school leaders. Through research conducted by Birmingham City University, the report presents an in-depth analysis of how creative pedagogies have influenced new and diverse notions of creative learning, creative engagement, and teaching for creativity. It highlights the successes and challenges of embedding creativity in schools and provides insights into how these practices can be further developed and implemented across the academy trust. This is achieved through the development of a toolkit that documents the repertoire of practices developed with creative practitioners and the creative processes observed and valued throughout the three years. The impact of this project has been experienced by a substantial number of children across the academy trust in the West Midlands and through professional development for teachers.





KEY DATA

YEAR TWO

Teachers collaborated with Open Theatre and Stan's Cafe on short term and long-term projects.

82 Staff members (including teachers, senior leadership, SENDCOs, HLTAs, and pastoral staff) engaged in classroom activities and reflection sessions.

136

Sessions delivered across schools by creative partner organisations.

1079

Children
(Reception to Year Six) participated

252

Including
SEND/SEMH

577

Pupil premium
learners

YEAR THREE

Teachers collaborated with Open Theatre and Stan's Cafe on short term and long-term projects.

81 Staff members (including teachers, senior leadership, SENDCOs, HLTAs, and pastoral staff) engaged in classroom activities and reflection sessions.

188

Sessions delivered across schools by creative partner organisations.

929

Children
(Reception to Year Six) participated

260

Including
SEND/SEMH

506

Pupil premium
learners



THE WIDER CREATIVITY COLLABORATIVES INITIATIVE

The Arts Council England Creativity Collaboratives programme seeks to build networks of schools to test innovative practices in teaching for creativity, and to share learning to facilitate system-wide change. Working alongside existing institutions and teachers, the programme seeks to co-develop creative strategy and pedagogy, test out approaches to teaching and learning, and evaluate their impact on learners, schools, and communities. The outcomes to be achieved are as follows:

1. Young people's creative capacity is nurtured, and personal, social, and physical wellbeing and academic development is greatly enriched. Inequality is reduced across protected characteristics.
2. Career pathways are supported by skills developed through creative learning and thinking. Teachers and school leaders are skilled and confident to teach with creativity and advocate teaching for creativity pedagogies and practice across their networks.
3. Teaching for creativity is a whole-school priority and practised across the curriculum.
4. Schools integrate teaching for creativity across the curriculum, including in science, engineering, and the arts.
5. The role of arts and culture in supporting teaching for creativity is understood, as are the conditions for establishing a culture of creativity in a school.
6. Schools work with a range of external partners, including a university.

This report documents year three of the Elliot Foundation Academies Trust Creativity Collaborative based in Birmingham, West Midlands.

METHODOLOGY

In year one of the project, and in consultation with key stakeholders including researchers, teachers, and creative practitioners, we formulated the central research question to guide our collaborative:

How can empowering teachers to develop creative pedagogies facilitate the environment in which learners are enabled to flourish and fulfil their creative potential?

To thoroughly address this overarching question, the research was also designed to explore several sub-questions:

- How can working with creative practitioners enable teachers and learners to expand their understanding of their own creativities?
- How can we rethink pedagogical practices to value a diverse range of creativities?
- What does teaching for creativity look like in practice?

The Collaborative

The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust Creativity Collaborative is one of eight projects being run as part of the nationwide programme, Arts Council England Creativity Collaboratives. The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust is a multi-academy trust with primary academies in the West Midlands, East Anglia, and London. All 12 primary academies in the West Midlands were involved with activities associated with year three of the Creativity Collaborative.

Following on from the Year One and Year Two Interim Reports (2022, 2023), during year three eleven of the primary academies worked in partnership with one of two organisations: Open Theatre (www.opentheatre.co.uk), Stan's Cafe ([stanscafe](http://stanscafe.com)). In year three, schools either continued their partnership with Open Theatre or Stan's Cafe from the previous year, or they began new collaborations by participating in introductory sessions and forming new partnerships. Further to this, in year three, one school partnered with SAMPAD ([HomePage - Sampad](#)).

It is noted that, throughout the creativity collaborative, the schools have engaged with a number of local cultural organisations: Walsall Arts Gallery, the Leather Museum and the Black Country Living Museum.

Every academy had one teacher who acted as the Creativity Collaborative Lead. At some schools this teacher also attended the sessions with Open Theatre, Stan's Cafe or SAMPAD. At other schools, other teachers (class teachers, teaching assistants or SEND support staff) attended the sessions with learners, with or without the Creativity Collaborative Lead. The creativity collaborative programme of work for year three can be found in **Table 1**.

Academy	Creative partner/s	Year groups	Project start and end dates
Billesley	Stan's cafe	Year 1	Jan - March
	Open Theatre	Rec - Year 6	Sept - July
Chandos	Open Theatre	Rec - Year 5	Oct - July
Croft	Stan's cafe	Year 5	May - July
George Betts	Stan's cafe	Year 4	Sept - Oct
Kings Rise	Stan's cafe	Year 4	Sept - Jul
Kings Norton	Open Theatre	Years 3 - 6	Oct - Dec
Netherbrook	Stan's cafe	Years 1 - 6	9th & 10th Nov
	Open Theatre		
Rounds Green	Stan's cafe	Years 1 - 6	Jan - July
	Open Theatre		
Shireland Hall	Stan's cafe	Year 4	Jun - July
Shirestone	Sampad	Nursery - Year 6	Oct - June
Tiverton	Open Theatre	Years 2, 5 and 6	Oct - May
Woodsbank	Stan's cafe	Year 2	Mar - June

Table 1 - Academies and their partnerships with creative organisations.

Approaches

As with year one and year two of the Creativity Collaborative, this year three evaluation centres on exploring the impact of creative collaborations upon teaching and learning. Using qualitative, creative, and arts-based approaches (Barone & Eisner, 2011), we investigated the experiences and perceptions of teachers, learners, and creative practitioners. Engaging in creative approaches to data collection allowed us to explore 'the affective-material life' of creative classroom spaces (Niccolini et al., 2018, p. 324) and consider the importance of intra-action between human and non-human agents in prompting new ways of knowing, communicating, and collaborating (Burnard, 2022; Taylor & Fairchild, 2020). Arts-based approaches in particular enabled participation from young people who preferred not to communicate using literacy-based approaches, such as questionnaires or surveys (Blaisdell et al., 2018; Mand, 2012). We did not pre-define our method but designed it in response to practices that developed within the Creativity Collaborative over the first two years of the research. The approaches, therefore, remained flexible, but also allowed us to reveal complex narratives around participation and impact without losing the rigour of more traditional approaches.

The Year Three evaluation includes:

1. Observations of school-based sessions run by Open Theatre, Stan's Cafe and SAMPAD, focussing on teaching for creativity and shared learning.
2. Teachers' termly reflection diaries and after session school slides on creative pedagogy and practice.
3. Creative focus groups with learners using visual elicitation (Epstein et al., 2006; Lapenta, 2011) and arts-based activities (Blaisdell et al., 2018), exploring learners' experiences and perceptions of creative development.
4. Focus groups with teachers and creative practitioners, using arts-based activities and dialogic discussion to investigate teaching for creativity (cf. Sternberg & Karami, 2021).

Analysis

Observations, reflection diaries, school slides, and focus group transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2013). This iterative approach enabled us to become familiar with participants' perspectives before identifying emergent themes. Using multiple cycles of coding and categorisation (Saldaña, 2009), we were able to delve 'beneath the surface' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 174) and explore the reasoning behind participants' understandings of the Creativity Collaborative.

In instances where arts-based data were collected (such as photographs, mind-maps, and drawings), we adopted an analytical frame in which reflective questions from the Theory of Change (e.g., How can we rethink pedagogical practices to value a range of creativities? What does teaching for creativity look like?) were used to guide our interpretation (cf. Blaisdell et al., 2018).

Ethics

This evaluation was approved by Birmingham City University Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences Ethics Committee. It was conducted in adherence with the British Educational Research Association (2018) guidelines on ethical practice in educational research. Participants were informed of the research objectives via an information booklet and consent form and were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. For learners who consented to participate in the evaluation, further consent was also sought from their parent(s) or guardian(s). In this report, all participants have been anonymised to protect their identities.



DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDINGS OF CREATIVITY

Our journey to understand creativity within the collaborative developed through a structured and iterative process spanning three years of research. Further details regarding the activities undertaken in years one and two can be found in the interim reports from those respective years. However, a brief description of activities will be provided below to give an overview of how our choice of approaches developed, emerged, and contributed to year three activities and the findings. It is also important to acknowledge how these approaches have helped contribute to the collaborative and partnership nature of this work, where notions of creativity have developed through sharing, discussion, critique, debate and group analysis.

Role of Observation in Developing Knowledge of Creativity

Observation played a critical role in our approach to developing an understanding of creativity. Over the three-year period, researchers observed classroom interactions, creative sessions, and workshops. These observations were crucial for capturing the nuances of creative processes as they unfolded. By immersing ourselves in the day-to-day activities and creative explorations of the children, creative practitioners, and teachers, we were able to gather rich, qualitative data that informed our understanding of creativity.

Bringing these observations back to the teachers was an integral part of our methodology. Through a series of whole day sessions, we shared reflections and insights, creating a collaborative dialogue that allowed teachers to see their practices from an external perspective. This ongoing exchange helped teachers and creative practitioners to become more aware of creative teaching and creative learning.

Reflective Diaries and Weekly Slide Submissions

In years two and three, we introduced a more structured approach to capturing teachers' insights and perceptions through termly reflective diaries and weekly slide submissions. This process aimed to deepen teachers' engagement with the project and to provide us, as researchers, with their valuable perspectives on the creative processes observed.

Teachers were asked to maintain reflective diaries, where they documented their thoughts and experiences related to creativity in their classrooms. These diaries served as a space for teachers to articulate their observations, challenges, and successes, allowing them to reflect on their teaching practices and the creative responses of the children. Additionally, teachers were required to produce weekly slides summarising the sessions. These were

predominantly image based with short reflections. The slides provided a structured yet flexible format for teachers to communicate their observations and insights.

Collaborative Reflection Sessions and Focus Groups

Year One

In year one, we engaged teachers and cultural partners in practical and reflective activities aimed at exploring their perceptions of creativity and their creative experiences.

Creative Exploration Session

During an online session, teachers participated in various creative activities designed to prompt reflection and exploration of their creative potential. These activities included responding to instructions, such as creating zigzags and making items to enhance listening, using materials readily available to them. Responses to these activities were playful, experimental, personal, and reflective. Participants selected significant items or artifacts that offered insights into their personal creative journeys.

Rivers of Experience

At a collaborative day in Walsall Art Gallery, researchers conducted another activity called 'rivers of influence'. This activity encouraged participants to reflect on their creative and professional lives by visualising their journey as a winding river, marking key turning points or critical incidents along its path. This reflective tool allowed participants to reconstruct significant milestones and consider the influences shaping their creative practices. It prompted reflection on experiences, facilitators, influences, barriers, and challenges to creativity in the classroom. It also began to identify and discuss reasons behind these facilitators and challenges, providing key strategies for change.

Throughout these sessions, ethical considerations were prioritised, and participants were encouraged to share experiences and insights with each other. The aim was to identify commonalities and differences in experiences and to use these learnings to inform the Creativity Collaborative. These activities fostered trust, collaborative working, and facilitated deeper understandings of creativity among participants, setting a foundation for further exploration and development in year two.

Year Two

In year two, we focused on developing a comprehensive understanding of creativity across the schools. The activities undertaken during this year aimed to assist teachers and cultural partners in critiquing and analysing creativity theory and models. The objectives of the sessions were threefold: first, to elucidate and assess existing theories of creativity; second, to guide participants in formulating their own conceptualisations of creativity; and finally, to establish emergent notions of creativity tailored to the Trust.

Creativity Framework Sessions

During the sessions, participants reflected on how their perceptions of creativity had evolved since year one. They were introduced to influential frameworks of creativity and prompted to analyse them through specific questions regarding their applicability to classroom teaching and learning. Subsequent sessions delved into policy surrounding creativity in education and cultural industries. Teachers shared their experiences of creative practices in classrooms, supplemented with examples of educational frameworks from various fields. These discussions facilitated reflections on integrating creativity into the Trust's educational model. The understandings developed from these activities helped the collaborative reflect on the best approaches for year three, emphasising the importance of developing a localised notion of creativity that aligns closely with the specific context and needs of the children across the schools.

Year Three

During year three of our research, our objective was to engage teachers and cultural partners in data analysis. Activities delved into the initial analysis of creative processes and repertoires of practices identified by the research team through their data collection and findings.

The Fishbowl Discussion

The Fishbowl discussion played a key role in our research methodology, providing a structured yet open platform for participants to share their perspectives and insights. This format allowed for focused dialogue among a select group of participants, typically seated in the centre 'fishbowl', while others observed. Participants self-selected to join the conversation, engaging at their own comfort levels. During these discussions, participants had the opportunity to articulate their perceptions, experiences, and reflections on the early analysis of the creative repertoire of practices identified by the research team. Moreover, the Fishbowl Discussion facilitated the return the data to the collaborative, enabling critical reflection on the findings and contributing to ongoing analysis.

Ranking exercise

Following the Fishbowl, small focus group discussions utilised a ranking exercise. This approach required teachers and cultural partners to rank the creative processes identified by the research team as most central to their practice. The exercise prompted participants to sort items according to predefined criteria, in this case, selecting the five most central creative processes. Participants systematically evaluated and prioritised creative processes that resonated most with their experiences and practices. This facilitated a deeper exploration of key processes and provided valuable insights into the nuances of creativity within and across the schools. Participants shared their perspective with one another giving further insight to their choices. Additionally, this exercise validated our list of creative processes, enhancing data reliability of diverse perspectives and practices.

Focus Groups and Interviews with Teachers and Creative Practitioners

To triangulate our observations and reflective practices, we also conducted focus groups and interviews with teachers and creative partners. These allowed us to gather deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives. Focus groups provided a platform for teachers to discuss their experiences collectively. They facilitated the sharing of ideas, challenges, and successes, and helped to identify common themes and unique insights into the creative processes.

Interviews, on the other hand, offered an opportunity for more in-depth, one-on-one conversations. By engaging teachers and creative partners in individual interviews, we were able to explore specific aspects of their experiences in greater detail. These interviews allowed us to explore more personal reflections, uncovering individual insights and stories that might not have emerged in a group setting.

Focus Groups with Children Through Creative Approaches

To ensure the voices of children were heard and valued in our research, we conducted focus groups using creative approaches. Recognising that traditional interview techniques might not fully capture the perspectives of children, we adopted a range of creative approaches designed to make the process enjoyable and accessible.

Over the three years, children were encouraged to express their thoughts and experiences through various creative mediums such as drawing and storytelling. Through these creative approaches, we ensured that children's voices were not only heard but actively integrated into our research findings. This approach underscored the importance of child-centred research methodologies and the key role they have in shaping the findings of this work.

THE REPORT STRUCTURE



The subsequent sections of this report will detail the findings from our research. Each section will have specific headings to navigate you through the findings, culminating in a conclusion that synthesises the evidence.



REDEFINING CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

It is important to reflect on some literature pertaining to creative partnerships to highlight the direction that this creativity collaborative took in developing teaching for creativity.

Creative Partnerships (CP) emerged as a significant policy initiative in response to the NACCCE report (DCMS and DfE, 1999), running from 2002 to 2011. This initiative aimed to integrate ‘creative practitioners’ into schools, fostering creative learning opportunities and addressing broader economic, cultural, and social national goals. With an initial investment of £40 million, CP sought to broker and build dynamic partnerships, engaging young people and exploring creativity in learning. The initiative implemented key messages from the NACCCE report, viewing creative learning as a means to address the broader goals of the time. CP saw its role as part of a wider shift in education, focusing on the active engagement of young people and encouraging purposeful inquiry into the applications of creativity in learning. The programme fostered numerous partnerships and relationships, often remembered by teachers and artists for the learning gains it promoted through continuous professional development. However, the execution of CP has been critiqued. The partnership model led to the development of ‘creative agents’ who brokered relationships between schools and external collaborators. Evaluations of CP revealed a ‘saviour discourse’ (Wild, 2023) and models of practice where creative projects were expected to produce measurable results within specific time constraints, emphasising productivity over the development of creative processes. Nonetheless, CP provided a context in which research into the unique contributions of artists to educational settings was conducted (Hall and Thomson, 2017; Hoekstra, 2015; Pringle, 2002; Sekules, 2003). Such studies have helped conceptualise the value of cultural and creative practices and how these partners promote creativity, including valuing process over product and fostering criticality.

This collaborative sought to address these critiques by redefining the notion of partnership. Instead of imposing external solutions, it emphasised collaboration, identifying specific school needs, engaging in longitudinal work, incorporating new planning processes and exploring diverse creativities. By working with schools rather than directing them, the project sought to empower teachers and creative partners to integrate, and critique creative practices together.

EXPLORING CREATIVE PARTNERS CREATIVE PROCESSES

At the beginning of year three, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from Open Theatre and Stan's Cafe to explore their creative processes and approaches of working with schools. These interviews aimed to uncover the typical stages of project development, the design of projects to fit specific school contexts, and the alignment of creative activities with curriculum goals. The findings from these interviews are presented below, organised by company; Open Theatre and Stans Cafe. These interviews provided valuable insights that served as a form of triangulation with other approaches used in this evaluation.

Open Theatre's Creative Process and Ways of Working

Open Theatre adopts a long-term process of working with young people, emphasising sustained engagement over time to fully understand their capabilities and what can be achieved together. This longitudinal interaction is crucial as it often takes several weeks and months to truly get to know the young people and tailor the approach to their unique needs and responses.

“We witnessed some of our least confident children blossom and become the most animated during those sessions. Teachers remarked on the remarkable transformation, seeing a side of these children that they had never seen before.”

The company prioritises understanding each child as an individual, with no fixed pattern of work. They enter sessions with a flexible plan, adapting their approaches in response to how the young people interact with the activities. This adaptability ensures that the work supports where the children are at, rather than imposing a rigid agenda.

“We want our learners to be prepared for a future that even we, as teachers, can't fully predict. Instilling creativity in them is essential for navigating this ever-changing world.”

Collaboration with school staff is a key element of Open Theatre's methodology. The company works closely with teachers, sharing their practice and ensuring that the learning environment is cohesive and supportive. This collaboration extends to providing continuous professional development for staff during sessions, fostering an integrated learning experience.

“Problem-solving is my top priority. If learners develop strong problem-solving skills, they will be better equipped to handle whatever challenges come their way in the next decade.”

A core principle of Open Theatre’s practice is non-verbal communication. They believe in the importance of exploring a wide range of communication approaches beyond words. This approach helps to free up other ways of connecting and interacting, which can be especially beneficial in a word-driven society.

“Creative learning significantly enhances children's communication skills, allowing them to articulate their wants and needs more effectively.”

Playfulness is another crucial aspect of engaging children in the creative process. Open Theatre encourages playful interaction, dismantling language to foster creativity and engagement. This playfulness, combined with a focus on creating a joyful learning environment, helps children feel safe, inspired, and open to discovering new things.

“Every child is part of the creative journey, gaining a deeper understanding of what creativity means and how it applies to their learning.”

In order to develop these playful approaches continuous observation and reflection are integral. Practitioners describe how they are constantly observing what happens in the room, identifying significant moments, and building on them to enhance the learning experience.

“Our pupils show increased engagement and enjoyment in their learning through creative activities.”

These reflections help focus on what each child can do, fostering a sense of agency.

“The sense of freedom and expression fostered by creative learning leads to a more enjoyable educational experience for our learners.”

In acknowledging these processes, Open Theatre accepts the challenges of integrating their approaches within mainstream education. They emphasise the need for flexibility and adaptability to overcome the constraints of traditional educational systems. Their work aims to demonstrate different ways of engaging and interacting with young people, offering new possibilities.

“Inclusive creative practices ensure that all pupils feel included and able to participate fully.”

This interview highlights key processes in Open Theatre’s practice: long-term engagement, adaptability, collaboration, non-verbal communication, playfulness, continuous observation, inclusivity, and agency.

Stan's Cafe Creative Approach and Ways of Collaborating

Stan's Cafe's creative process begins with a careful and deliberate planning phase aimed at aligning their work with the specific needs and goals of a school. The initial stage involves meetings with senior leaders to identify the school's priorities and development plans. This step ensures that their efforts are tailored to address the most critical areas identified by the school, whether that involves specific year groups, teachers, or aspects of the curriculum.

“The planning process is fundamental. We work closely with senior leaders to determine how best we can support the school's objectives. This collaboration helps us focus our efforts where they are most needed.”

Following the initial planning, Stan's Cafe collaborates with the identified teachers to refine the focus of their work. This stage involves detailed discussions about how the theatre company can assist with topics or curriculum areas. The logistical aspects, such as the duration of their presence in the school, are also agreed upon during this phase.

“We aim to integrate our creative process seamlessly into the school's curriculum delivery. This ensures that our work not only enhances creative learning but also aligns with the educational goals of the school.”

An essential part of planning involves setting clear artistic outcomes. While the process itself is vital, having a concrete goal such as creating a book, an exhibition, or a performance helps motivate everyone involved and provides a tangible objective to work towards. This goal-oriented approach ensures that the creative process remains focused and productive.

“We believe in having a specific artistic outcome to aim for. Whether it's a performance, a piece of visual art, or any other creative product, having a goal helps keep everyone engaged and committed.”

Stan's Cafe emphasises transforming the physical learning environment to foster creativity. By changing the classroom space or even moving activities outdoors, they create an atmosphere that encourages creative thinking and learning. This physical transformation helps learners and teachers alike to break free from the constraints of traditional classroom settings and explore new possibilities.

“Changing the physical space is crucial. It allows learners to see the classroom as a dynamic environment where creativity can flourish.”

The company's approach in the classroom mirrors their collaborative artistic practice. Instead of imposing a rigid script or plan, they introduce a topic and encourage a collaborative exploration of ideas.

“Our classroom work reflects our artistic practice. We engage in a collaborative process where everyone's ideas are valued, and we aren't afraid to explore and experiment together.”

Long-term partnerships with schools are important to Stan's Cafe's methodology. By working with the same schools and teachers over extended periods, both the creative practitioners and the teachers grow in their respective practices, learning from each other and enhancing their skills.

“Long-term partnerships are invaluable. They allow us to see learners progress through the years and help teachers develop their creative teaching practices.”

The notion of "professional critical friends" is also integral to these partnerships. This concept emphasises mutual growth and learning, where both the theatre company and the school staff support each other in developing new skills and approaches. Team teaching, where creative practitioners and teachers co-lead sessions, further strengthens this collaboration.

“Being professional critical friends means that we continuously reflect and improve our practices together. This mutual support is key to fostering creativity in schools.”

This interview highlighted that Stan's Cafe's creative process is characterised by careful planning, collaboration, long-term partnerships, and a commitment to transforming both the physical and conceptual learning environment.

Conclusion

The interviews offered valuable insights into the organisations' goals and their vision for collaborating with schools. This is important; these ways of working and practices shape how the collaborative develops. It is also important to explore whether these practices are achievable or face any constraints, particularly when developing creativity. What follows in the report details how these practices were enacted and expanded with the Elliot Foundation Academy schools.

DEVELOPING CREATIVITIES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH CREATIVE PARTNERS

The next section will focus on evidence gathered through observations and school reflective diaries and slides. The researchers observed sessions across all the schools in the collaborative and attended end-of-term performances produced. Centrally, the observations, reflective diaries and slides generated evidence to suggest that the creative partners employed strategies and approaches that enhanced teaching for creativity. These could then be identified and observed through specific creative processes. We will document each company separately before drawing our conclusions.

Open Theatre Findings

Open Theatre collaborated with six academies in year three. Five academies had a longitudinal collaboration and substantial contact time with Open Theatre who typically worked in schools for a whole day or half a day every week. One school engaged in taster sessions.



Open Theatre are experienced in taking year-long school residences in special schools. This was the second year of them running an equivalent model in mainstream settings. A diverse range of year groups took part, encompassing Reception to Year 6, as outlined in Table 2.

Academy	Creative partner/s	Year groups	Project start and end dates
Billesley	Open Theatre	Rec – Year 6	Sept - July
Chandos	Open Theatre	Rec - Year 5	Oct - July
Kings Norton	Open Theatre	Years 3 - 6	Oct - Dec
Netherbrook	Open Theatre	Years 1 - 6	9th & 10th Nov
Rounds Green	Open Theatre	Years 1 - 6	Jan - July
Tiverton	Open Theatre	Years 2, 5 and 6	Oct - May

Table 2 - Open Theatre's groups.

Based on Open Theatre's extensive history of working in special schools, several academies focused on their learners with additional needs, sometimes forming mixed-age groups. In these instances, it was agreed that the same groups of learners would participate throughout, allowing the practitioners to form strong relationships with the learners and teachers. This approach also enabled participants to fully explore Open Theatre's non-verbal physical theatre approaches. Building on year two of the Creativity Collaborative, the sessions centred on non-verbal communication and movement, facilitated by music and various props. Open Theatre employs a process-oriented and child-centred ethos, aiming to build meaningful connections with learners through non-verbal interactions. Consequently, although the sessions included planned activities, there were no set outcome criteria or final sharing events. Instead, the longitudinal nature of the work focused on exploring the non-verbal, embodied, and affective aspects of creativity, with deep reflection on what different forms of creative learning looked like in a mainstream classroom.

Below are a series of subheadings which identify key aspects of Open Theatre's practice which has helped shape teachers' and learners' understanding of teaching for creativity and creative learning. This section includes quotes from teacher reflection diaries and research fieldnotes which will on occasion take the form of a vignette to offer insight into practice.

Affective and Embodied Connections through Materials and Artefacts

Materials and artefacts were central to Open Theatre sessions, shaping how learners engaged with spaces, music, and imagined scenarios. Everyday items like hats, scarves, and chairs were explored for their tactile qualities, prompting a wide range of creative responses and gestures. These physical objects acted as catalysts for expressing various emotions, from joy and laughter to tension and fear, enabling learners to explore and navigate their feelings in an environment where emotional expression was prioritised. This approach not only provided learners with a sense of control and agency but also allowed them to invent scenarios and guide creative practitioners. Reflecting the principles of 'slow pedagogy', the method balanced structure with flexibility, encouraging learners to creatively utilise classroom spaces and everyday items. By focusing on the physical properties of objects, learners, their bodies, and the spaces around them collaboratively shaped the activities and experiences.

“The room used was quite empty, with chairs placed on either side. The space was open for the children to interpret how to apply the moves and how to use the space. Creativity was activated by expression through movement rather than verbal communication.”

(Teacher Reflection)

Normative classroom structures were often challenged, giving learners the autonomy to choose their level of participation – whether joining in, observing, or leaving the session. This approach questioned traditional notions of safe spaces, highlighting how safety and discomfort can together foster engaging teaching practices.

Physical movements were also crucial for fostering creativity. Activities such as freeze frames and animal movements encouraged physical expression and collaboration

“Dancing, walking, acting. Children have to use non-verbal communication to participate in the session. They must use their imagination to decide what the prop might be and how they can portray that to the group without speaking.” (Teacher Reflection)

“Children have been able to express how they feel more easily through the non-verbal facial expressions and body language they use. They have been learning how to read other people’s body language so that they can understand them without speaking.”

(Teacher Reflection)

Music played a vital role, setting dynamics, provoking emotions, and creating immersive atmospheres. It enhanced non-verbal interactions and supported learners in exploring different characters and creative dimensions. Carefully chosen music created specific emotions at various stages.

“... the music really set the tone for the session; you can see the children start to embody the characters as the music starts.”

[Teacher Reflection]

Creativity was further activated through playful games and activities. This approach allowed learners to engage their imagination freely, without feeling constrained by excessive rules.

“Playful games allowed for decision-making ... like the statue game, were particularly effective in encouraging creativity.”

[Teacher Reflection]

Vignette 1: Researcher Fieldnotes

The creative practitioner wears a mask featuring a very sad expression. Instead of responding to the sadness, the children are fascinated by the mask and eagerly reach out to grab it. Realising that the mask isn't having the desired effect, (which I think is to explore emotion), the creative practitioner quickly sets it aside and opts for another mask. The creative practitioner transforms into a clown. This clown is initially depicted as tearful and upset, with yellow tulle fabric used as a large hanky. The change in approach proves to be much more successful. The children are immediately drawn to this new character. They engage with the clown by pretending to sneeze with playful “atchoo” sounds, trying to make him laugh. They comfort him by patting and stroking his head, tickling him, and helping him use the hanky to dry his eyes. The response is enthusiastic and heartfelt. One child, deeply affected by the clown's emotion, steps out of the space to the teacher present, saying, “We have to make him happy. What are we going to do?” Although they speak, which is not typically a factor of the session, their concern illustrates a significant emotional connection with the clown's character. After receiving a reassuring facial expression, the child re-enters the space and joins in the comforting actions. Interestingly, this is the same child who had previously attempted to remove the mask from the practitioner, in a way signalling their want of him to remove the previous mask. Their shift from reacting with frustration to engaging empathetically with the clown suggests that the transition to the clown character has allowed them to connect more deeply with the emotions being portrayed.

... As the activity progresses, it shifts to be entirely child-led. The children continue to use “atchoo” sounds and tickles to cheer up the clown, exploring and expressing their own comforting behaviours. The game evolves into a collaborative exploration where they take on characters and explore other emotions such as happiness, empathy, frustration, and joy.

Playful Spaces and Environments

Sessions took place in various indoor school spaces such as classrooms, school halls, libraries, and breakout rooms. The creative practitioners were adept at adapting to each environment, clearing furniture as much as possible to create space for physical expression. Having open space was crucial for Open Theatre, distinguishing their sessions from traditional classroom settings. Learners' interactions varied depending on the

space. In smaller rooms, despite limited space, learners still expressed creativity by hiding behind bookshelves, tables, and chairs before quickly rejoining the circle.

“The room used was quite empty, with chairs placed on either side. The space was open for the children to interpret how to apply the moves and how to use the space. Creativity was activated by expression through movement rather than verbal communication.”
(Teacher Reflection)

In contrast, larger spaces, like school halls, allowed for more dynamic activities.

“The classroom filled with excitement as the children dive into a playful ring game. In this game, both children and adults become masters of the ring, attaching rings to others who are 'frozen' in place.” (Teacher Reflection)

Activities such as throwing and catching hats led to learners running around and expressing themselves with more physicality. Learners also engaged in various activities like crawling on the floor, crouching, pursing lips, dramatically staring, creeping around, striding (as if on a catwalk), skipping, holding planks, doing press-ups, jumping, lying down with legs in the air, freezing, dancing, tapping, doing the splits, arching backs to create bridges, creating heart shapes out of hands, swaying, and silent beatboxing.

“The classroom transforms into a lively dance space as the group of children enthusiastically grooves to the beats of the music. The room is animated with a flurry of movement: children are free to express themselves with star jumps, crawling in and out of the circle, and even mimicking sea creatures with fin-like shapes.” (Teacher Reflection)

The freedom to be physically expressive in these diverse spaces opened numerous possibilities for learners.



Vignette 2: Researcher Fieldnotes

... Next, the children encounter a new challenge – a tightrope made of two scarves stretched across the floor. [Creative practitioner] demonstrates the tightrope by walking precariously along it, bending and swaying as if on the brink of falling. The children observe intently, recognising the difficulty of the task. When [teaching assistant] has a go, they hesitate at the tightrope, looking apprehensive, a child steps up to offer comfort by rubbing her back, a silent gesture of support.

Another child approaches the tightrope, unrolling the scarf to make it thicker and easier to walk across. As the scarf transforms into a more stable bridge, the children collaborate, silently working together to create a more accessible path for [teaching assistant]. Their collective problem-solving is evident as they adjust the scarf, turning it from a narrow tightrope into a broader bridge.

Once the bridge is ready, [teaching assistant] walks across it with confidence, reaching the other end successfully. The children cheer her on and take their turns navigating the bridge. When [creative practitioner] introduce a new challenge – placing the scarves farther apart to create a gap – the children quickly understand the task and begin adjusting the scarves to bring them closer together, making it easier to cross.

Repeating Games and Activities

Regularly revisiting familiar games allowed learners to build confidence and deepen their engagement. These repeated games would often happen at the beginning and end of the session to ground the learners and help them work collaboratively as a team. This consistency created a comfortable space which, when moving onto another activity, enabled them to more freely express themselves. They had built up the confidence through the repeated activities to then be able to move more confidently and interact in the session.

“Children introduce their own moves and actions, which are often adopted and built on by other children within the sessions.”

[Teacher Reflection]

This collaborative aspect of the sessions further enhanced learners’ confidence and creativity, as they felt empowered to contribute their unique ideas and see them incorporated into the group’s activities. Silliness was actively encouraged, transforming the learning environment into one filled with laughter and playfulness. This atmosphere of joy not only fostered a sense of community and trust among the participants but also enhanced their willingness to take risks and explore new ideas.

Vignette 3: Research Fieldnotes

The focus shifts to the game of Wink Murder. The game begins with detective-themed music playing softly in the background, creating an atmosphere of intrigue. As the children move around the room, the suspenseful music sets the rhythm for their actions. They don’t merely walk; their movements become an expressive dance of spinning, jumping, and tiptoeing, all synchronised with the music. The atmosphere has

anticipation as the children shade their eyes and carefully avoid making eye contact with the “killer” who has been secretly designated by the creative practitioner. The children’s engagement with the activity is evident; they eagerly immerse themselves in the game, responding to the music and the playful challenge. The initial hesitation for some of joining in slowly goes away, replaced by enthusiasm as they become fully invested in the experience. Even a child who initially seemed disengaged ends up smiling, clearly enjoying the play and their role in the game. I think this is because they have realised that the game is all about communication and observation and also teamwork as they all help each other find the killer.

As the game progresses, the creative practitioner introduces an additional element: the detective now has a magnifying glass, and a shiny gold coin is added to the mix. This new element heightens the sense of mystery and excitement. The children’s creativity and problem-solving skills come to the forefront as they navigate the game dynamics, using their imaginations to enhance their roles as detectives and killers. Their connection in the session is recognisable, you can see how the game is allowing them to connect non-verbally, to work together and communicate. This is all through play.

Inclusive Practices

Central to Open Theatre’s approach is the cultivation of environments where individuals of all backgrounds, abilities, and perspectives feel welcomed and valued. This inclusivity is explored in several ways within their sessions.

Firstly, Open Theatre fosters an atmosphere of acceptance and respect, where differences among participants are not only acknowledged but celebrated. By encouraging creative expression and communication through non-verbal means, they provide a platform for individuals to engage authentically without the constraints of traditional verbal communication, thereby accommodating diverse communications.

“[Creative practitioner] and another pupil share a moment of connection as they play with the scarf. Their eye contact and smiles are a testament to the presence and mutual enjoyment in their creative interaction.” (Researcher Fieldnote)

Moreover, the sessions are designed to be accessible and adaptable, ensuring that everyone can participate regardless of physical or cognitive challenges. This inclusivity extends to the approaches employed during activities, which are intentionally flexible and accommodating to individual needs, promoting a sense of belonging and empowerment among all participants.

“In the statue game, the pupils engage in the gentle and thoughtful task of arranging rings on their classmates. They carefully manoeuvre their peers’ arms and legs to position the rings, demonstrating a high level of care and attentiveness.”
(Researcher Fieldnote)

Ethically, Open Theatre prioritises mutual respect and understanding, emphasising collaborative engagement and shared decision-making processes. They actively involve learners in co-creating the session dynamics, which enhances a sense of ownership and responsibility within the group. This approach not only promotes ethical behaviour but interpersonal skills.

“Equality is maintained as all children start off with the same experience.” (Teacher Reflection)

“Safety is ensured as all children participate and ‘have a go’.”
(Teacher Reflection)

“All of the learners' contributions are valued even if they only observe or are very reluctant to join in.” (Teacher Reflection)

Slow and Reflective

Open Theatre employed principles of slow pedagogy (Clark, 2022). A central aspect of this pedagogical approach was the emphasis on time, underscoring the importance of observing progress over a longer period. Embracing learners' individual journeys and pathways was crucial, often valuing creative choices that sometimes involved stepping away from an activity. For Open Theatre, the focus is on valuing all forms of engagement, even if brief, as they can positively influence subsequent behaviours. During debriefing sessions with teachers and researchers, learners' participation – regardless of its duration – was acknowledged and appreciated. Instead of seeking full participation or identifying the 'most' creative learners, practitioners concentrated on recognising even the briefest significant moments. The fluid structure of the sessions, combined with occasional pauses and moments of physical stillness, allowed practitioners to 'be with' (Clark, 2022) the learners and let their ideas emerge organically.

Vignette 4: Researcher fieldnotes

The slower pace of the session allows children to fully immerse themselves in the exploration of the blue fabric. As they gently blow on the fabric and watch it flutter and sway through the air, it takes on a magical quality. The semi-translucent fabric creates a screen between the teacher and a pupil, who engages in a playful exchange of blowing the fabric back and forth. This interaction underscores the principles of slow pedagogy, where the gradual and thoughtful pace of the activity enhances the sensory and emotional experience. The waltz music, with its ethereal tones, complements the soft, graceful movement of the fabric, adding to the sense of wonder.

Modelling practice

One of the key methodologies in Open Theatre sessions was the role of creative practitioners in modelling non-verbal practices. Typically, sessions involved two practitioners, allowing learners to observe their interactions closely. This facilitated a firsthand experience of how to engage in non-verbal communication, creativity, and collaboration. The presence of two practitioners enabled dynamic demonstrations of various techniques, gestures, and expressive movements.

In instances where only one practitioner was present, they encouraged teachers within the space to assist in modelling practices. By actively involving teachers as co-models, practitioners enriched the learning experience, fostering a supportive atmosphere where both practitioners and teachers worked together to demonstrate and encourage creative practices effectively.

Longitudinal nature of the work

Longitudinal partnership and collaboration were central to Open Theatre approach with the schools. This approach to creative engagement provided teachers and learners with a unique opportunity to develop a deep understanding of diverse communicative activities over time. By participating in sessions that spanned an extended period, learners were able to explore and refine their creative expressions through various activities such as non-verbal theatre practices, imaginative play, and collaborative storytelling.

For teachers, the longitudinal nature was instrumental in observing and documenting learners' progression in these communicative creativities. Over time, many teachers could begin to document how learners developed from initial explorations to more sophisticated expressions. Furthermore, the longitudinal aspect enabled teachers to assess the impact of Open Theatre sessions on learners' overall development, beyond academic achievement. Teachers could witness firsthand how participation in creative activities fostered not only communicative skills but also enhanced confidence, empathy, and interpersonal relationships.



Creative Process Orientation

Rather than focusing on achieving predetermined results, such as performances or products, Open Theatre engaged in activities designed to stimulate creative exploration and collaboration. Teachers were encouraged to think divergently, exploring multiple perspectives and unconventional solutions to challenges presented during the sessions. The intrinsic value of the process was evident as learners immersed themselves in activities that encouraged spontaneity, imagination, and self-expression.

“In our Open Theatre sessions, it's not about achieving a perfect performance or a polished product. Instead, we focus on the journey. The real value lies in watching learners dive into the process, experiment with different ideas, and collaborate in ways that spark their imagination. It's about fostering a space where creativity flows freely and where learners are encouraged to think divergently and embrace the process of discovery. This approach not only enhances their creative thinking but also builds their confidence to take risks and express themselves authentically.” (Teacher Reflection)

Collaboration

In Open Theatre sessions, a collaborative environment is fostered where learners actively listen to and build on each other's creative ideas. This open communication and respect for different perspectives enhance empathy and appreciation for diverse viewpoints. Learners observe and learn from the actions and gestures of their peers, which inspires new ideas and strengthens collaborative skills. The sessions encourage self-regulation, patience, and active participation, allowing learners to manage impulses, share resources, and engage fully in group activities.

“Children learn to build on each other's ideas ... They not only share their own ideas through the non-verbal practice but also deeply appreciate the contributions of their peers, which fosters a strong sense of community and mutual support.” (Teacher Reflection)

Engagement

Open Theatre sessions offered a unique approach to fostering engagement among learners by reframing what might typically be perceived as disruptive behaviour. Rather than viewing these behaviours negatively, creative practitioners harnessed them, allowing learners to push boundaries so long as they remained fully engaged in the interaction. This approach had significant implications for developing creative and other-centred classrooms. However, it could be challenging to implement with larger groups where activities, space, and noise levels restricted the number of interactions that could occur simultaneously.

“... engagement is about embracing every moment of learner behaviour as a potential for creativity.” (Teacher Reflection)

Several factors were vital for enabling creative progression. Persistent and repeated decision-making prompted by creative practitioners allowed creativity to be activated and sustained. Adequate time was provided to develop and expand on ideas, and practitioners' skilled improvisation transformed seemingly uninteresting actions into engaging and creative dialogue. Most importantly, learners had the permission to explore and enact a range of roles, fostering a rich environment for creative engagement.

Post-Session Reflection

After some sessions, teachers and creative practitioners discussed what worked well and what could be improved. This dialogue deepened teachers' understanding of their learners' creative processes, aligning the methodologies introduced during sessions with the broader educational goals of the school.

Reflective practice allowed teachers to critically evaluate creative processes and outcomes, observing how learners' understanding, and application of creative communication evolved over time. This practice helped identify specific areas of growth, such as improvements in non-verbal communication, increased confidence, and enhanced collaborative skills. By tracking these developments, teachers gained insights into how sustained exposure to creative practices influenced learners' overall educational journey.

“Post-session reflections have been invaluable in understanding our learners' creative development. By discussing what worked well and what didn't, we've been able to fine-tune our approach and better integrate creative practices into our daily teaching.”

(Teacher Reflection)

Furthermore, post-session reflection provided a deeper understanding of how different activities resonated with learners. Teachers could analyse which approaches were most effective in fostering creativity and engagement, informing future planning and adaptation of teaching strategies to better meet the needs of all learners.

“Talking about it with the practitioners has not only highlighted individual growth in areas like non-verbal communication and confidence; but also helped us tailor our strategies to meet the diverse needs of our learners which I hope to take back into the classroom.” (Teacher Reflection)

STAN'S CAFE FINDINGS

Stan's Cafe partnered with 7 academies. The range of year groups spanned year one to year six. Stan's Cafe typically ran projects over one term comprising a series of weekly workshops. Each of the projects were bespoke to the schools. One school engaged in taster session with Stans Cafe. This information is shown in **Table 3**.

Academy	Creative partner/s	Year groups	Project start and end dates
Billesley	Stan's Cafe	Year 1	Jan - March
Croft	Stan's Cafe	Year 5	May - July
George Betts	Stan's Cafe	Year 4	Sept - Oct
Kings Rise	Stan's Cafe	Year 4	Sept - Jul
Netherbrook	Stan's Cafe	Years 1 - 6	9th & 10th Nov
Shireland Hall	Stan's Cafe	Year 4	Jun - July
Woodsbank	Stan's Cafe	Year 2	Mar - June

Table 3 - Stan's Cafe's groups.



A summary of each project can be found in **Table 4**. These summaries were provided to the research team by Stan's Cafe.

School and Project Title	Project Outline
Billesley Welcome to the UK	<p>A project with Year 1 based on the school's existing 'Welcome to the UK' curriculum element. One of the aims was to experiment with moving away from writing in topic books by making both learning and evidencing more active and immersive. Each week the children (played at) visited different parts of the UK using different approaches of transport. Sessions involved music, drama, storytelling and art activities. The 'journeys' were filmed and photographed, evidence which could then be seen by activating QR codes attached to specially created UK maps.</p>
Croft The Coming of the Canals	<p>Year 5 learnt about the development of Walsall into and through the industrial revolution. The reason for canals being built, how they were, commissioned, paid for, designed and built. They learnt about their limitations and dangers as well as the lives of those who lived on the canal boats. All before looking ahead to what might succeed the canals. Working with theatre makers and a singer songwriter they turned this knowledge into a theatre show which they shared with the rest of the school, parents, family and friends.</p>
George Betts Eureka!	<p>Year 4 worked with an actor used a range of different activities to learn all about Ancient Greece. At the culmination of the project, they created a marketplace in the school hall to share their knowledge with other year groups. They were able to talk confidently about everything from democracy to medicine, sport to archaeology. This marketplace was enjoyed by Parents and others from the school community.</p>
Woods Bank Sister Dora	<p>Year 2 learned a lot about Sister Dora, a revolutionary figure in nursing from the Victorian age. By studying her biography, they learned about Walsall at that time, working conditions, how the town developed and how people lived. From this information they created a series of photographic tableaux which became an illustrated biography of Sister Dora's life. They also produced a play dramatising her life, which included songs written with a Singer/Songwriter. This performance was shared with the school and parents.</p>

School and Project Title	Project Outline
Tiverton Saving the Butterfly	A theatre maker worked with learners studying <i>Save The Butterfly</i> an allegorical picture book. They worked on role play to develop empathy with the characters, explore the book's themes and work together more collaboratively.
Kings Rise The Chairness of a Chair	A cycle of six songs were written by Year 4 learners with a singer/songwriter investigating philosophical problems - inspired by Philosophy for Children (P4C). The learners illustrated some songs with visual art and created and performed drama-based introductions to the songs. The full cycle was performed both in school and at University of Birmingham (Department of Education) as part of a day devoted to exploring how philosophy can be explored in schools.

Table 4 - A summary of each project by Stan's Cafe.

Below are a series of subheadings which identify key aspects of Stan's Cafe's practice which has helped shaped teachers and learners understanding of teaching for creativity and creative learning.

Challenge and School Improvement Orientation

Stan's Cafe's approach to working with schools was rooted in a school improvement perspective, aiming to address specific needs. This method begins with an in-depth exploration of each school's challenges and aspirations. Initially, Stan's Cafe engages in collaborative discussions with teachers and school leaders to identify these challenges. By inviting schools to articulate their challenges, Stan's Cafe ensures that their interventions are responsive and directly relevant to the school context.

This initial phase also serves as a crucial foundation, allowing both parties to align their understanding and set clear objectives for the collaboration. Following these discussions, Stan's Cafe then embarks on a planning process to design bespoke projects tailored to each school's unique circumstances and goals. This phase involves the development of detailed project outlines that highlight the scope, objectives, and expected outcomes of the intervention. Importantly, these outlines are not just imposed by Stan's Cafe but are co-created with input from school stakeholders, ensuring ownership and commitment from all parties involved.

The collaborative nature of this approach extends beyond initial planning to include ongoing partnership throughout the implementation phase. Stan's Cafe works closely with teachers and school staff to refine and finalise project details. This collaborative planning and delivery process not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the interventions but also fosters a sense of shared responsibility and accountability.

“The collaborative process with Stan's Cafe was transformative for our school. By directly addressing our specific challenges and working together to create something tailored to us, we saw different engagement in what otherwise was a project that needed revitalising.” (Teacher Reflection)

Devised pedagogies

Pedagogical approaches associated with devised theatre emphasise collaborative creation, where the learning process is as important as the final product. Stan's Cafe's approach was often open and dynamic, typically starting with an idea rather than a specific script for a final performance (Milling and Heddon, 2015). Learners, teachers and creative practitioners created or sourced the stimuli material, often derived from texts, images, media, sound or archives. Research indicates that experimental and creative learning processes, supported by appropriate structures and feedback, are more effective than instructive approaches (Sawyer, 2019). We saw much of this in action in Stan's Cafe sessions where guided improvisation happened, such as where learners engaged in open-ended assignments with the freedom to explore.

Kjølner (2009) notes that devised theatre can involve collective ensemble work or individual contributions, with hierarchies ranging from leader-driven to flat structures. In their sessions, Stan's Cafe often took a democratic and collaborative approach where decision-making was led by the learners. This approach valued the creative process over specific outcomes, allowing for the possibility of starting again if necessary (Oddey, 1994), and enabled learners to plan, initiate, and create the content (Grandi, 2022).

“The freedom to explore ideas and contribute to the creative process made the sessions engaging for the learners. It wasn't just about reaching a final performance but about valuing each step of the journey.” (Teacher Reflection)



Vignette 1: Research Fieldnotes

The session started with an exploration of the concept of love, tracing its origins back to the Ancient Greeks and the goddess Aphrodite. The creative practitioner introduced the discussion by posing a question about the different types of love. Learners were guided through an understanding of love in various forms: friendship, platonic love, romantic love, and love for objects. They were encouraged to consider love beyond the romantic, focusing on friendships and familial bonds. Learners shared personal examples of what they love, such as electronic tablets, kittens, and puppies. One learner remarked, “I love my tablet, but that’s different from other love,” highlighting the distinction between affection for things and for people.

The conversation took a thought-provoking turn when the creative practitioner asked, “Do you think the love of ‘things’ is the same as family?” This question sparked a lively debate among the learners, who agreed that familial love is unique and irreplaceable compared to the affection for material possessions. The discussion moves on when the creative practitioner posed a more challenging question: “If the place was on fire, would you grab your PlayStation or your brother?” The responses were animated, underscoring the deep-seated value of family over things.

As the discussion moved on, the creative practitioner introduced various terms related to love. Instead of using the word “love” for celebrities like Ronaldo, the learners brainstormed alternative expressions of admiration. They explored the concept of transactional love, where relationships might be influenced by money or other benefits, and discussed how some relationships can be overly controlling.

The session also explored Greek concepts of love: Eros (romantic love), Fraternal/Platonic Love (friendship and family, which is non-romantic), and Agape (selfless love for humanity). One learner observed, “You don’t know strangers, but you don’t hate them”.

Rethinking planning

Stan's Cafe's approach to planning differed significantly from traditional teaching methods. Instead of using rigid plans with predetermined aims and targets, they embraced a more flexible, creative planning model that balanced structure with improvisation. Stan's Cafe used a scaffolded framework that allowed for multiple learning pathways and guided exploration. This method was sometimes misunderstood as chaotic freedom without guidelines, instructions, or structure. However, what appeared as unstructured was, in fact, a carefully balanced environment fostering originality and collaboration, centred around the learner's ideas rather than reproducing the teacher's or creative practitioners' concepts. The balance between freedom and structure was delicate yet intentional. Stan's Cafe valued pedagogical improvisation often adjusted plans to meet the needs of the moment, changing and taking new creative turns suggested by the learners.

“In discussions with [creative practitioner] about the direction of learning and various approaches each explored each week, [teacher] has been advocating for a more immersive approach to science planning for the summer term. [Teacher] is eager to extend

this approach into the Religious Education curriculum, which the school is still developing. [Teacher] has observed that children learn more effectively through hands-on experiences rather than traditional retrieval approaches. They believe that integrating this creative learning style more broadly into the curriculum could be highly beneficial. With an open mind and a clear vision of the desired outcomes, this immersive approach appears to be a strategy worth exploring in future work.” (Teacher Reflection)

Vignette 2: Researcher Fieldnotes

[Creative practitioner] starts the session with a sense of adventure – the children prepare for their journey. “Don’t worry, I’ll make us some stone soup,” he declares, prompting an excited chorus of “ewwww!” from the class. During their rural and urban expedition, the practitioner engages the children’s senses with prompts like, “Can anyone make the sound of boiling water?” and “Can you smell it? Breathe in...” These sensory cues spark the children’s imaginations as they immerse themselves in the role of cooks on a journey. Two children eagerly contribute to the pretend meal, one offering an imaginary onion, while another excitedly shares a book, declaring “lots of chicken!”

... they move onto creating a cityscape. With a large roll of paper, paper templates, and glue, the children collaboratively design their city, engaging in role play as if on a real journey to Manchester. [Creative practitioner] adopts the role of a tour guide named Steve, using props like a cap, an umbrella, and a Mancunian accent to animate the experience. His prompts, such as “Next restaurant, follow me” with a playful march and an umbrella as they move on with their travels.



Reflection

Reflective practice was a key part of the sessions, both during and after the activities. During the sessions, teachers and creative practitioners engaged in real-time observation and reflection, a process often described as thinking in action. This allowed them to adapt their approaches dynamically, responding to the immediate needs and reactions of the learners. Teachers observing and participating in the sessions could see firsthand how different strategies and activities influenced learner engagement and creativity.

“I think the sessions have allowed the teachers to see that learning can occur at the same level even if the children are not recording everything in their books. The children definitely enjoyed this project more than our standard Sister Dora unit. The sessions have impacted teachers, making them more inclined and confident to include creative activities in their lessons and to find different approaches to recording children’s work. Staff are starting to understand that creativity goes beyond dance or drama and includes collaboration, problem-solving, and more.” (Teacher Reflection)

The sessions offered a new way of thinking about creativity, though often in subtle ways that the children didn’t notice until a discussion was had. The children engaged in roleplaying, thinking outside the box, and using their senses. For me, being part of the project already, my understanding of creativity has changed. I am definitely thinking more about the approaches I use to bring topics to life.

(Teacher Reflection)

Team teaching and co-design

Pringle (2008) highlights a crucial consideration in creative partnerships is the potential risk that artist-led pedagogy might undermine broader and longer-term creative learning strategies within a school. One significant issue is that art practitioners, unburdened by curriculum constraints, can adopt creative and experimental pedagogic approaches, whereas teachers often cannot. This dynamic can inadvertently position the artist as a creative ‘other’ and the teacher as a didactic enforcer, potentially reinforcing normative roles and limiting the perceived impact of artists’ interventions. Instead, Stan’s Cafe worked closely to co-design programme of work with teachers and school as highlighted in his reflection.

“The planned outcome for the Stan’s Cafe work is to explore the concept of teaching without barriers to learning, such as literacy skills, holding the children back from sharing what they have learned or contributing to lessons. Additionally, we want children to have more autonomy within lessons to make decisions and choose what they would like to do (with support from the teacher) to showcase their learning. The question of ‘learning with a purpose’ has been

explored with the planning of this topic, and if the children have a goal to work towards, they will engage with, enjoy, and thus learn more in lessons.” (Teacher Reflection)

Teachers actively explored creative approaches and methodologies with the creative practitioners. This approach enabled teachers to consider how to continue these practices into other subject areas.

“The team-teaching approach with the creative practitioners was incredibly enriching. By working alongside the practitioners, we were not only part of the creative process but also learned new strategies.” (Teacher Reflection)

The use of questioning and problem solving

Questioning played a central role in the learning process, encouraging learners to make connections, invent and reinvent, and become more flexible and curious. This shifted the classroom dynamic, empowering learners to share understandings and reflect critically with one another rather than being solely teacher-led. Social skills were nurtured through a process of co-authorship. This democratic relationship, where learners' opinions were valued, was fostered through open questioning during sessions.

- Can anyone suggest?
- What materials did you use?
- What skills did you use?
- What do you like about your work?
- Is there anything you could improve?

These questions promoted learner contributions to the learning process, encouraging the sharing of ideas, the use of imagination, and the evaluation of learning practices. In one of Stan's Cafe's projects, the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach was utilised, encouraging children to engage in thoughtful dialogue and critical thinking. This method involved asking specific, open-ended questions that prompted learners to explore ideas deeply and reflect on their perspectives. By integrating P4C, sessions became more interactive and intellectually stimulating, allowing children to articulate their thoughts and reason through complex issues. This approach supported the development of critical thinking skills, encouraged respectful dialogue, and helped learners make connections between their creative projects and real-world contexts.

History and research

Stan's Cafe's approach to preparing their programmes of work with schools is distinguished by their commitment to thorough historical and archival research. This method ensures that their initiatives are deeply rooted in both theory and practice, providing a rich and contextual foundation for the activities they design. By exploring historical records and archival materials, Stan's Cafe develop programmes that are not only educational but also culturally and historically informed. They ensured that the content resonated with the learners on multiple levels. By incorporating culturally significant themes, the children were able to make meaningful connections to both historical events and contemporary issues. This approach not only engaged the learners but also helped them understand the relevance of their learning in a broader context. For instance, projects might explore local history or global events, allowing children to see the impact of these events on their own lives and communities. This relevance fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation of the material, making the learning experience more impactful and memorable.

Final performance

A significant aspect of Stan's Cafe's work is the culmination of each project in a final performance. This final outcome is a key component of their approach, providing a tangible and celebratory conclusion to the creative journey. The process of working towards a performance imbues the projects with a sense of purpose and direction, motivating learners to engage deeply with the material and to invest in their creative development. The final performance serves several critical functions in fostering creativity. First, it offers learners a platform to showcase their talents and hard work, reinforcing the value of their creative contributions. This public demonstration of their achievements can boost self-esteem and inspire a sense of pride and accomplishment. Second, the performance acts as a powerful tool for reflection and assessment. Learners, teachers, and creative practitioners can observe the culmination of their efforts, gaining insights into the effectiveness of the creative processes and the areas that may need further development. Moreover, preparing for a final performance encourages learners to collaborate, problem-solve, and think critically. It requires them to integrate various creative skills – such as storytelling, acting, and improvisation – into a cohesive presentation. Finally, the concluding performance creates an opportunity for the wider school community, including peers, teachers, and parents, to engage with and celebrate the learners' creative journey. This communal aspect fosters a supportive environment that values and nurtures creativity, encouraging ongoing engagement and exploration in future projects.

Vignette 3: Researcher Fieldnotes

“What shall we make a song about?” the facilitator asked, laying a large roll of paper on the floor. The mood was light-hearted. As the learners settled into the activity, the facilitator wrote “Ancient Greek medicine” on the roll of paper, sparking the start of their songwriting journey. The creative practitioner encouraged learners to lie on the floor, drawing and writing about what they knew. The usual desks were pushed aside, creating a more informal, interactive environment.

The room was filled with chatter and humming as learners discussed and expanded on their ideas. They eagerly shared their knowledge, recalling details about ancient Greek medicine, such as the four humours, and gods like Asclepius, the god of healing. The creative practitioner and learners reviewed key terms, discussing concepts like “Do no harm,” “lavender for sleep,” and “healing temples,” which would all contribute to the song’s lyrics.

As the session progressed, learners gathered in a semi-circle facing a board where their words and phrases were displayed. They began drafting the first version of their song, considering different musical styles. The creative practitioner proposed starting with the Hippocratic Oath.

.... I’ve noticed a learner, who preferred to remain on the fringes of the group, tapping rhythms on their shoes and legs, contributing their own beat. Their presence was quiet, but they are engaged, even though they did not sing aloud. Another learner, observing from a distance, seemed lost in thought but remained attentive, swaying to the rhythm and exploring their surroundings ... interestingly, later, they both engaged more fully with the songwriting process. This exemplifies the different ways we might engage – there is perhaps something in their tapping rhythms and the slowness of their engagement. Crucially the practitioner and teacher allowed this thinking space to happen.

Conclusion

The observations of Stan's Cafe and Open Theatre sessions revealed several repertoires of practice that these creative partners bring to teaching for creativity. These practices created an inclusive and supportive environment where teachers could observe and co-teach and where learners could also play a role in shaping the outcomes of learning. These practices are highlighted below:

Affective Engagement

Creative practitioners engaged learners' senses and emotions by incorporating activities attentive to their feelings, personal stories, and perceptions. They fostered a caring and supportive atmosphere using visual gestures, facial expressions, and objects to explore emotions. Carefully selected music and various physical movements further enhanced the emotional and sensory experience.

Adventurous Pedagogies

Adventurous pedagogies, a concept introduced by Dennis Atkinson (2018), emphasises the importance of embracing uncertainty and creativity in the educational process. In these sessions, practitioners embraced uncertainty and risk, encouraging learners to explore new ideas without worrying about mistakes. They focused on the learning process rather than the final outcome, empowering learners to take the lead and make decisions. This shift in power dynamics fostered a collaborative, learner-centred environment. Furthermore, incorporating games and short activities built a sense of community and excitement, while open-ended 'what if' questions sparked curiosity and imaginative thinking.

Place, Space, and Environment

Practitioners transformed learning environments by rearranging desks to create open spaces that encouraged collaborative engagement. Lessons were conducted in diverse settings such as school halls, libraries, breakout rooms, and local parks. Each space was adapted to suit the learning activities.

Inclusive and Ethical Practices

Inclusivity was at the heart of their repertoires of practice. Practitioners actively participated in creative activities alongside learners, observing and connecting with them. They disrupted traditional power dynamics by allowing learners to lead. Furthermore, recognising learners' individual creative journeys and their unique processes were key. Practitioners harnessed perceived disruptive behaviour and redirected it into positive social interactions. They valued both group-based collaborative creativity and individual expression, ensuring learners had the autonomy to express themselves while working with others. Creating intense and immersive learning experiences encouraged noticing, dwelling, and slowing down, ensuring learners' well-being through necessary support. Non-verbal communication and empathy were also emphasised to ensure participation and understanding regardless of verbal abilities.

Slow and Reflective Practices

Practitioners promoted a slow pedagogical approach that favoured repetition and familiarity to gradually enhance learners' creative responses. Flexibility and reflection allowed practitioners and teachers to adapt lessons spontaneously and, in the moment, based on ongoing reflections and feedback.

Partnership and Collaboration

Long-term collaborations were central. Building trusting relationships over time enabled both creative practitioners and teachers to expand their own repertoires of practice based on learners' preferences.



In year 3, SAMPAD collaborated with Shirestone Academy. Their collaboration was specifically designed to enrich the learners' and the wider school's understanding of South Asian heritage. Recognising the value of incorporating cultural diversity into the curriculum, SAMPAD tailored their programme to celebrate and explore South Asian traditions through performance and creative workshops with the school.

Developing the Programme of Work

SAMPAD devised the programme of work in collaboration with the senior leadership team at the school. The work had two main goals: to engage children meaningfully in a range of culturally relevant opportunities and for staff to receive continuous professional development (CPD). Three days' worth of work was devised, one day each term comprising of:

- **Autumn Term:** South Asian Dance storytelling for Years 4, 5 and 6. Plus CPD for teachers using dance gestures for oracy and English.
- **Spring Term:** Drama and History activities for Years 1, 2 and 3 using class readers as stimulus and CPD exploring a range of strategies for language development.
- **Summer Term:** Art and Printmaking activities for early years and Islamic Printing CPD for all staff.

Other enrichment opportunities included:

- 'My Journey My Birmingham' Theatre in Education Piece for Years 5 and 6.
- 'City of Empire to City of Diversity – A Visual Journey' Exhibition: SAMPAD facilitated a two-week exhibition residency in the school during Autumn 2.
- 'I Have a Dream' International Writing Competition: SAMPAD encouraged the school's participation in the international writing competition. The school submitted entries from 58 learners in Years 5 and 6. 23 learners had their writings selected by the judges to be included in a published book, which features pieces from primary and secondary learners in both the UK and India.
- Heritage CPD Session at Highbury Hall: In collaboration with Historic England, SAMPAD invited two of the teachers to attend this CPD.

Methodology

The programme of work conducted during SAMPAD's collaboration with Shirestone Academy in year 3 represents a bespoke piece of work specifically designed for this single school. It is important to note that these observations are written about separately from the data collected from the Open Theatre and Stan's Cafe. The bespoke nature of SAMPAD's collaborative work means that the approaches, activities, and outcomes were uniquely tailored to this school's context and needs. Consequently, the findings from

SAMPAD's work will be presented and analysed independently to accurately reflect the specific impacts and insights gained from this programme.

A researcher observed two sessions facilitated by SAMPAD:

1. A performance session for Years 5 and 6. Spirit of Light was a 45-minute performance that explored South Asian narratives, specifically the Hindi epic of Rama & Sita and the Sikh celebration of Bandi Chhor Divas. The session provided children with an opportunity to experience professional dance and performance.
2. A CPD twilight session for teachers: Focusing on integrating creative and culturally appropriate teaching practices, the session featured practical activities where teachers explored the use of hand gestures and physical narration to enhance classroom learning. The session encouraged playful interaction and collaboration.

Findings

The Performance

The performance, Spirit of Light, was a 45-minute presentation exploring the Hindi epic of Rama & Sita and the Sikh festival of Bandi Chhor Divas. While the performance was a professional showcase, it provided a demonstration of how stories can be brought to life through dance, music, and props. The use of toy tealights, colourful fabrics, and cushions, alongside South Asian classical music, created an immersive experience that highlighted the value of creative storytelling. This researcher vignette describes some of these experiences:

Music (South Asian style, sitar) plays a very important role, setting the tone for the stories, it shifts into being a very upbeat rhythm for dramatic effect when a character draws a circle around themselves to protect themselves from demons. The musician plays most of the way through. The first story (a Sikh story) explores aspects and big themes such as a "blossoming friendship", meditation and "selfless service", fairness, justice, and reprieve. So, feelings, attitudes and values underpin the story and inspire the artistry. ... The artist introduces the second, Hindu, story and explains that there will be different princesses with different personality traits (e.g. one is "kind, loyal, short tempered"). Dancing will embody the characters and the different coloured scarves will be used to signal each princess. As there are only one or two dancers at any point, this shows how important visual cue/prompts like dance and colour can be for developing narrative and understanding. It also taps into the way in which bodies can express character, emotion and perhaps inspires children that it is possible for an individual to shape shift and be many different characters. At one point, the artist embodies the roles of a 'golden deer' in the woodland, with quick agile movements and tip toes, and they also play the role of 'Monkey God'. The children visibly delight in this.

CPD Session Insights

For the CPD session, teachers engaged in a wide range of activities that explored some of the processes of SAMPAD's approach, such as using Indian classical hand gestures and physically narrating scenes. In Indian classical dance and theatre, mudras (hand gestures) play a crucial role in storytelling and expression. Among these, Samyuta Hastas (also known as Samyuta Mudras) are a specific category of hand gestures that involve

the use of both hands. These gestures are employed to convey detailed and nuanced meanings, narratives, and emotions. The session emphasised the importance of these physical expression and imagination in storytelling, encouraging teachers to rethink their pedagogical practices. In this small vignette the researcher recorded the teachers' interactions:

They then move onto working in pairs followed by small groups to physically narrate scenes and incorporate hand gestures. There is a lot of giggling and playfulness, you can tell some teachers are out of their comfort zone, but they enjoy it and there is clearly a strong bond between them that perhaps helps them to be themselves and try things out.

Conclusion

SAMPAD's collaboration with Shirestone Academy in year 3 exemplifies the importance of schools identifying specific school needs and culturally relevant creative activities. Through working with SAMPAD many teachers stated that the children 'felt seen' and 'were raving about it'. Despite its short-term nature, the sessions revealed the importance of culturally significant creative practices. Looking ahead, it is hoped that Shirestone Academy will continue its partnership with SAMPAD to build upon these experiences. Sustaining this collaboration could ensure that the benefits of integrating cultural creativity into the curriculum are further developed.



THE IMPACT OF CREATIVITY COLLABORATIVES ON TEACHING FOR CREATIVITY

In this next section of the report, we will reflect on the impacts of the work on teaching for creativity. To explore the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of Creativity Collaboratives on teaching for creativity, creative teaching, and creative learning, we employed two primary approaches: whole day reflective sessions and individual and focus group interviews. Each will be discussed in turn.

Whole Day Reflection Sessions

We organised two whole day sessions that featured a combination of fishbowl discussions, ranking activities and smaller focus groups.

The Fishbowl

The fishbowl discussion is a dynamic and inclusive method designed to facilitate an open exchange of ideas. In this setup, a small group of participants engages in a discussion in an inner circle (the fishbowl), while the remaining participants sit in an outer circle, observing the conversation. This format encourages active listening and allows observers to gain insights from the discussion before they can join in and contribute their perspectives. The primary aim of the fishbowl discussion was to debate and critique the repertoires of practice and the creative processes observed in collaborative sessions with creative partners Stan's Cafe and Open Theatre.

Ranking Activity

The ranking activity was designed to help teachers reflect on and evaluate the impact of creative processes on their teaching practice. The list was collated by the researchers who from analysis had identified 36 creative processes. The activity was structured as follows:

1. Teachers began by taking a few moments to read through a list of creative processes.
2. They identified five creative processes that have had the most significant impact on their teaching. These could be strategies they have developed, explored, or observed in action.
3. For each selected process, they wrote down a brief note on a post it, explaining why it was important and how it has influenced their teaching practice.
4. Then, they organised their selected processes either hierarchically, from most impactful to least, or in a non-hierarchical manner that reflects their unique perspective.

5. If there were any creative processes not documented in the provided list, teachers were encouraged to include these in their list.

The ranking activity served several key purposes in the context of research:

- Engaging in this activity allowed participants to reflect on their own teaching practices and the creative processes that shaped them, helping them articulate and consolidate their understanding of effective teaching strategies.
- After selection, the activity sparked discussions among teachers, facilitating the exchange of best practices and innovative teaching approaches.

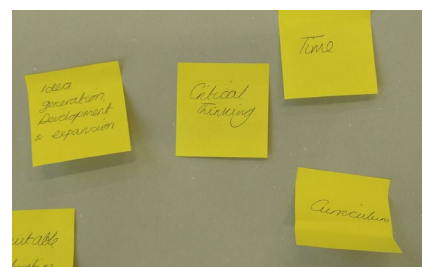
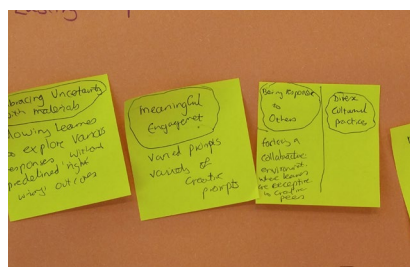
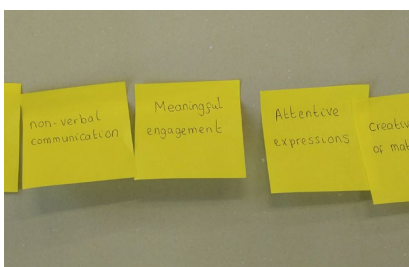
When combined with other approaches like the fishbowl, interviews, and focus groups, this activity aided in triangulating data, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of research findings.

One-to-One Interviews and Additional Focus Groups

To further explore teachers' perceptions, we conducted a series of one-to-one interviews and additional focus groups during the year. The one-to-one interviews were particularly useful for accommodating teachers' varying schedules and ensuring that we could capture a wide range of individual insights. The focus groups, on the other hand, continued to offer the benefits of collaborative discussion, allowing teachers to build on each other's ideas and experiences. This mix of individual and group formats ensured a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' perceptions. The interviews and focus groups were semi-structured allowing space for teachers to expand research questions. Examples question explored included:

1. What is the value of working with creative partners?
2. What is teaching for creativity?
3. What does it look like in your classroom? What is the Impact?
4. Can you share experiences and reflections on the repertoire of practice and pedagogical approaches observed and conducted in the sessions? What has been the impact of these practices on creativities?
5. What creative processes have you observed, and which ones have been central to children's progression?

The combination of data from these aspects will now be presented under the following subheadings: Teaching for Creativity, which explores the strategies and approaches used to foster creativity; Repertoire of Practice and Creative Processes, which examines the diverse range of teaching practices and the creative processes identified by the teachers; and Impact on Creative Learning, which assesses how these practices and processes influenced and enhanced creative learning outcomes.



Teaching for Creativity Focus Groups

Teachers' definitions of teaching for creativity revealed a broad spectrum of perspectives, highlighting the diverse notions of this concept. Rather than converging on a single, definitive response, their views encompassed a range of ideas, each illustrating different aspects of fostering creativity. Teaching for creativity involves being open to new ideas and not adhering to a fixed agenda. It means modelling creative thinking and discourse, encouraging exploration, and allowing learners to lead their own learning.

“It is about being open to ideas and having no fixed agenda.”

“It's about modelling creative ideas and encouraging exploration and discovery in the children.”

Teachers emphasised the importance of providing inclusive opportunities that cater for different needs. This includes creating environments where children can express themselves in ways that suit them best and making connections across different experiences.

“We need to allow learners to direct and have agency.”

“It is so central to provide opportunities which are inclusive, especially for those children who find it hard to access curriculum.”

“Teaching for creativity allows the children to think for themselves and express themselves in the way that suits them best.”

“Teaching for creativity is about an inclusive approach that goes beyond; it's about looking at the whole child and what they bring, which is not necessarily defined by performative outcomes. It's teaching for the whole child; it's child-centred.”

Effective teaching for creativity involves promoting and facilitating open-ended, child-led learning and problem-solving. It means enabling children to think independently, express themselves freely, and explore their thoughts and ideas without fear of being wrong.

“Teaching for creativity is not a top-down approach. It is about being child-centred, helping them make connections, link experiences. It's about facilitating child-led learning and problem solving.”

“Teaching for creativity is encouraging children to express themselves.”

Teachers highlighted fostering an environment where learners feel safe, inspired, and curious. This includes demonstrating a genuine interest in how children interpret and respond to various stimuli.

“It’s about demonstrating curiosity and opening up the doors to children to widen their knowledge of the world around them.”

“Teaching for creativity is about creating an environment where young people feel safe, inspired, and open to discovering new things.”

Encouraging learners to make connections, both within their learning and to the world around them, was seen as essential. Teachers noted that teaching for creativity is about creating opportunities for discovery and engagement, rather than a top-down approach.

“Teaching for creativity is about making connections, linking experiences.”

“Teaching for creativity is about enabling children to make connections and discover new things.”

Overall, teaching for creativity was seen as enabling learners to broaden their knowledge and express themselves in unique and personal ways. It involves nurturing a mindset where there is no right or wrong answer, but rather an emphasis on individual expression and exploration.

Repertoires of Practice and Creative Processes

Teachers highlighted the profound impact of employing a diverse range of practices and creative processes they deemed essential for fostering creativity in the classroom. Through fishbowl discussions, ranking activities, and focus groups, they shared their insights and experiences, emphasising the impacts of these approaches on teaching for creativity and creative learning. The quotes presented below have been thematically organised to reflect key aspects of the analysis and findings.

Affective and Embodied Communication

One of the crucial aspects of fostering creativity discussed by teachers is the use of non-verbal communication. Teachers observed that this approach enables all learners to fully engage and express themselves without relying on spoken words. Such practices allow learners to “come to life” and participate in learning activities in a more meaningful and inclusive manner.

“It was amazing to see how children who are non-verbal could shine within those sessions. Everyone was able to just come to life because they didn’t have to rely on their own using words to express themselves.”

The impact of creative approaches on learners facing significant challenges was particularly evident. For example, one teacher recalled a child who arrived from a war-torn country, having experienced considerable trauma. Despite being non-verbal and learning English as an Additional Language (EAL), this child’s first “genuine smile” emerged during activities explored during the project. This highlights how creative

approaches can profoundly affect learners, even those dealing with severe difficulties.

“I remember a child who arrived from a war-torn country. Although the details were unclear, it was evident that the child had experienced significant trauma. Despite being non-verbal and learning English as an additional language, I saw the first genuine smile from this child when they engaged with theatre activities. This highlights how creative approaches can have a profound impact on learners, even those with significant challenges.”

Teachers also noted the importance of adapting learning environments to improve engagement. Initially, non-verbal communication posed challenges for both teachers and learners. However, experimenting with different settings, such as arranging chairs in a circle, helped address these issues and enhance learner participation.

“Initially, non-verbal communication was challenging for both teachers and learners. We found that different learning environments, such as using a circle of chairs in the hall, helped improve engagement. Addressing issues like language development and cognitive challenges goes beyond just academic subjects and addresses broader needs.”

Another significant challenge mentioned was the difficulty some learners face in articulating their thoughts or understanding the impact of their actions. Non-verbal cues are particularly challenging for children with neurodiverse conditions or those not yet diagnosed. Teaching these social cues is crucial for their well-being and understanding.

“I worry when a group of learners cannot articulate their thoughts or understand the impact of their actions. Non-verbal cues can be difficult for children, especially those with neurodiverse conditions or those not yet diagnosed. Teaching these social cues is essential for their well-being and understanding.”

In addressing the needs of learners who cannot rely solely on their vocabulary, especially those with English as an Additional Language (EAL), engaging senses and emotions becomes crucial. During Open Theatre sessions in particular, learners were encouraged to express themselves freely with minimal constraints, highlighting the importance of inclusive practices.

“We must engage learners who can’t rely solely on their vocabulary, especially EAL learners. Using senses and emotions has been crucial. For example, during Open Theatre sessions, learners were encouraged to express themselves freely with minimal constraints. This approach was beneficial and highlighted the importance of inclusive practices.”

Further to this, activities like using a single object to transform into an entirely different character were noted as particularly effective in fostering creativity and self-expression among learners.

“During our sessions, learners used a single object to become an entirely different character. This exercise was particularly effective in encouraging creativity and self-expression.”

An example given by a teacher of the positive impact of creative approaches is a learner with autism and ADHD who is non-verbal. This learner eagerly anticipated the Open Theatre sessions each week, showing significant enthusiasm and improved confidence. Although these sessions were brief, they greatly contributed to the learner's progress.

“There's a learner with autism and ADHD who is non-verbal. She eagerly anticipated the Open Theatre sessions every week, showing great enthusiasm and improved confidence. Although the sessions were only 40 minutes a week, they significantly contributed to her progress.”

Teachers also highlighted the role of body language and diverse materials in enhancing learner engagement. Using tools like hats and scarves, along with expressive body language, significantly improved learner involvement and interaction.

“The use of expressions and body language just to entice the children and to get them involved, and to use different materials, made a big difference.”

Teachers recognised also found that embracing uncertainty and allowing learners to explore various responses without predefined outcomes was impactful.

“Embracing uncertainty with materials, allowing learners to explore various responses without predefined right or wrong outcomes.”

“Everybody goes in there and regardless of if they can articulate what they're thinking or not, they're even. So, you are at the level playing field straight away. It's non-threatening.”

Creativity in the Curriculum

Teachers identified the integration of creativity within the curriculum as both a vital and challenging aspect of their practice. One of the central themes discussed was the need for unlearning and relearning traditional approaches to embrace teaching for creativity. Creativity, they noted, often involves stepping away from established norms and being open to new ways of thinking.

“Unlearning and relearning, and not being afraid to do that, are part of creativity.”

Integrating creative practices while adhering to national curriculum standards and Ofsted requirements was a key challenge. Teachers expressed the importance of weaving creativity throughout the curriculum in a way that complements these standards. The goal is to balance creativity with curricular demands, recognising that creativity can enhance educational outcomes if aligned thoughtfully with these requirements.

“Kind of meets the needs of the national curriculum, meets the needs of Ofsted, so creativity has to flow as a lovely thread throughout that.”

Teachers also highlighted the value of providing freedom and flexibility within the learning environment. Allowing learners to explore ideas without rigid criteria or the pressure of being "right" or "wrong" was seen as essential for fostering creativity. This approach encourages learners to engage deeply with their learning processes.

“Without criteria, so freedom to explore with no pressure of getting things wrong.”

Effective planning for creativity was important for this to develop. Teachers stressed that creativity cannot be left to chance but requires intentional time allocation and thoughtful integration into lessons. This planning ensures that creative opportunities are not only available but are meaningfully incorporated into the curriculum.

“You need to plan the time for these things. You can't expect them to just happen without a bit of thought and creativity.”

Teachers also noted the importance of trial and error in developing creativity and resilience. Providing opportunities for learners to experiment, observe others, and refine their approaches supports their creative growth.

"The ability to try something and then try again ... seeing others and thinking about the Open Theatre sessions."

However, teachers pointed out the constraints imposed by rigid schemes of work and assessment frameworks. Strict adherence to these frameworks can limit creative exploration and hinder the integration of creative practices. They also raised concerns about the impact of Ofsted inspections on creativity, noting that the pressure to conform to standardised expectations often diminishes opportunities for innovative teaching.

“Yeah, we can deviate, but not any further than the outcome. So, you are always kind of trapped in a box, so to speak, if you have a scheme of work.”

“You've got to go from Ofsted deep dive and explain what a Year 6 child knows ... If you want to give them as much support as possible ... by doing that you end up taking away their creativity and freedom.”

Accurately evidencing creative learning was another important aspect discussed. Teachers highlighted the need for documentation that reflects individual learner outcomes and the creative process, which is crucial for assessing and showcasing progress.

“It's about thinking about how you capture it, so that evidence is important, purposeful, and shows the child's outcome and learning.”

Incorporating learners' voices into the curriculum and allowing for flexibility was noted as essential for fostering creativity. Teachers discussed adapting their plans to respond to learners' interests and inquiries, making learners feel valued and engaged in their learning.

“The children feel really valued and I think it's important for us to reflect on our teaching practice to ensure that's happening now and then, so the children feel like they are part of the curriculum that we taught.”

Finally, the importance of time for reflection and exploration was highlighted. Teachers observed that significant learning moments often occur when there is space to appreciate the creative process and allow for deeper engagement.

“Has the success rate of that lesson or that learning process been much higher, and a lot of the children are learning different ways? ... You've been afforded time to take a step back to see some of those fleeting moments in action.”

Teachers discussed the critical role of time in facilitating creativity. Many felt that time constraints often limit their ability to plan and implement creative lessons effectively.

“Time is more a thing that I think we lack. I think teachers will always lack time, no matter whether it's planning, marking or creating beautiful creative lessons.”

“... I think time is given where people feel it is most important.

“... I think more time within our federation as well as our schools needs to be dedicated to give teachers the brain space.”

Empowering learners to take control of their learning has been a significant change. Teachers, influenced by collaborative efforts with other schools, now allow learners more freedom in shaping their lessons. For example, in Year 4, teachers involved learners in deciding how the Anglo-Saxons play should be structured. Teachers have found that plans do not need to be set in stone. Adapting plans as they go, influenced by learners' input, is a key part of the creative process.

“Teachers, including myself, can be quite particular about how things should be done or how they should look. Empowering learners to take the lead and decide how they want their lesson to turn out has been a new approach for us. It's been influenced by collaborative efforts with other schools, where we all agreed to let learners have more control. For instance, with our Year 4 teachers, we discussed

how the Anglo-Saxons play should be structured and who should lead it. It's crucial to consciously consider how we can empower learners by asking them what they want and allowing them to shape their learning experiences. This approach encourages problem-solving and acknowledges that making mistakes is part of the learning process."

"Throughout our journey, our plans for lessons have evolved multiple times. It's become clear that plans don't need to be set in stone; they should be adaptable to the needs of the learners. This flexibility has impacted how I view lesson outcomes, showing that they don't always need to be a written piece."

"Creativity involves adapting and evolving ideas. If our plans change along the way, that's part of the creative process. Whether it's the journey, the children's input, or the props used, nothing is fixed. Flexibility is key."

Inclusive Practices

Inclusivity emerged as a central theme in the discussions, with teachers considering the importance of creating meaningful and accurate learning experiences that ensure all learners feel included and valued in the creative process.

"We want something meaningful. And is being accurate being inclusive?"

Teachers highlighted that inclusivity supports diverse expressions of creativity and ensures every learner can participate fully. They underscored the need for equitable collaboration, which involves addressing the varied needs of all learners, including their behavioural and language needs. This equitable approach is essential for fostering a creative and supportive environment.

"... equitable collaboration, thinking about the needs of different children in the classroom and not just the learners' needs, but also their behaviour needs."

Teachers also raised concerns about behaviour management and its impact on creativity. They noted that strict routines and expectations can sometimes hinder learners' creative expression. While maintaining good classroom practices is important, it can also restrict learners' ability to engage freely in creative activities.

"Behaviour and fear from teachers in approaching creative teaching because they might be scared of behaviour. Is it actually poor behaviour? Is them getting excitable and talking a lot? Is that bad? We've got such strict structures and routines, and we

want compliance. A lot of the time we want order, but that stifles creativity.”

Understanding and managing creative behaviours without suppressing creativity remains a significant challenge for teachers but one in which over the course of the three years they have progressed and acknowledged.

Building strong relationships with learners was also identified as a key component of fostering creativity in the classroom. Teachers observed that developing these relationships creates a supportive and engaging learning environment, helping learners feel valued and connected.

“I've seen relationships with children who I wouldn't have thought of before building up and now interacting with each other.”

“Building the relationships is so important because that's the foundation for everything.”

“So, it's building trust, I think because the children see me in a totally different way when I'm in there, especially if they're leading, if they've got the leading role. So, I'm moving whatever they're doing, they've got the control. When I want her to do and then because I'm laughing, they're laughing and you just get that, that bond and I do. I find that the session there's lots of laughter in there and smiles.”

Re-thinking the Affordances of Creative Educational Spaces

The discussions highlighted the transformative impact of rethinking traditional classroom layouts to foster creativity and engagement.

“We're taught to sit on a chair. Sit at a table. I see that the classroom can be more than just chairs and desks. What happens if you tip the table up? It becomes an easel if you turn your chair a different way. Can it become a seat for a rocket ship or, you know, like thinking about the space differently?”

By exploring unconventional uses of classroom furniture and space, teachers illustrated how flexibility in the physical environment can significantly enhance learners' creative thinking and engagement. The idea is not just to rearrange furniture, but to encourage learners to see their surroundings in new and imaginative ways. One aspect of this reimagining is the importance of embracing playfulness and silliness in teaching. Teachers observed that allowing learners to experiment and be playful, while maintaining necessary classroom discipline, can significantly enhance engagement and creativity.

“One thing I've observed is the importance of embracing playfulness and silliness in teaching. While we need to maintain a level of discipline and manage classroom dynamics safely, recognising

that learners are naturally inclined to experiment and be playful is essential. As adults, we also explore and experiment when learning new things, so it's important to allow children to do the same."

Role of Creative Partners

The role of creative partners in fostering creativity within schools was a key topic of discussion. Teachers noted the importance of these partnerships in not only generating creative ideas but also in supporting the implementation and sustainability of long-term creative strategies.

"[Practitioner] was like, "What is my role in this?" Actually, his role is giving the teachers the tools to make this work long term rather than coming up with all of the ideas."

"Working with creative education partners has allowed us to see things from an entirely new perspective. In education, we often have a linear view, but their input has broadened our understanding of what positive interaction can be. It's made us question whether it's always necessary to have what we think is 100% interaction."

These collaborations not only enhance creative teaching practices but also offer new insights and opportunities for both learners and teachers. Teachers recognised the impact of working with external experts as a powerful component of professional development, reinforcing existing skills while pushing the boundaries of creative practice.

Such partnerships also bring valuable resources and perspectives.

"The long-term collaborations with our partners ... we need those, those kind of highly skilled professionals in school to be able to, yeah, one upskills teachers and two promote the creativity. Opening my eyes to that creativity."

Assessing Creativity

Assessing creativity presents unique challenges within traditional educational frameworks. Teachers highlighted that creativity is inherently personal and does not easily conform to standardised assessment models. This complexity raises questions about how best to value and measure creative efforts.

"It's difficult because creativity is quite personal. It's difficult. Everybody's creating in their own way. It's not one-size-fits-all. So, it's like if you look at a maths test, it's like a walk. English, yes, there's a bit more interpretation; but with creativity, it's just how are you creating. You're creative this way or that way. That's creativity in itself, so trying to narrow it down, you fit it into a box to assess it would be quite tricky today."

This reflection underscores the challenge of fitting creativity into conventional assessment frameworks. Creativity's personal and diverse nature means that traditional approaches, which often rely on standardised criteria, may fall short. Teachers also discussed the distinction between “Big C” and “Little c” creativity (Craft, 2000), acknowledging the significance of both. “Big C” creativity refers to groundbreaking ideas that have a substantial impact, such as those of famous innovators, while “Little c” creativity pertains to personal, everyday creative moments.

“Like a lot about “little c” creativity and “big C” creativity ... If you can have an idea that is that idea for you for the very first time and it's as creative as Einstein ... that idea for you is as important.”

However, a crucial part of the three-year programme has been exploring and observing creative learning which has given many of the teachers' clear insights into what creativity looks like and how they can give it value.

“Over the three years I've really started to unpick for myself what creativity looks like and how I can see it in the children. In many lessons now, not just the ones with Open Theatre and Stan's Cafe but in lessons generally, you can start to recognise things like risk taking or experimenting. I think it's because we have been given time to explore these things and see them in action and get to talk about them.”

Navigating Uncertainty

Teachers discussed the importance of embracing discomfort and unpredictability to foster resilience and adaptability in themselves and their learners.

“I really like that notion of what you feel comfortable with and like don't feel comfortable with because I think throughout the past few years, we've had to live with that, doing things that we feel uncomfortable with. I suppose that's the only way that we start to change our practice, isn't it?”

“... for me, experiencing that was anxiety-inducing for myself because I always need to know what's going to happen. ... also the children needed to learn alongside me and that was OK not to know what the end goals was; the end goal was going to be after seven weeks.”

Teachers recognised the need to model resilience and adaptability by trying new and potentially uncomfortable approaches.

“I've got quite on board with that one, embracing discomfort with something. ... When we did the Open Theatre sessions, a lot of it is quite silly and they get the staff involved.”

“Because I was leading it, I kind of just had to throw myself in it. ... It’s about modelling problem-solving and being OK with fear.”

School Creativity Culture Shift

A notable aspect of the legacy of Creativity Collaboratives in schools is the shift towards a more creative school culture. Teachers have observed significant changes in their approaches to both teaching and assessment as part of this broader cultural transformation.

“I really wanted something that I felt could make a structural difference in our school ... I need something that I feel like I can take away from this three-year project and say, “this is a change to the way that we run and function eventually.”

This cultural shift is not merely about introducing new practices but embedding creativity deeply into the fabric of school life. It involves re-evaluating traditional approaches and embracing innovative approaches to ensure that creativity becomes a central element of the school's identity and operations.

Reflecting on Practice

Reflecting on practice was highlighted as an important part of effective teaching and continuous improvement. Teachers underscored the importance of creating dedicated spaces for feedback and self-evaluation to enhance their approaches and better address the needs of their learners.

“It's important to have that space for feedback and reflection to understand what’s working and what isn’t, and to adapt practices accordingly.”

The process of regular review and reflection allowed the teachers to assess what strategies were effective and identify areas for improvement:

“We need to regularly review and reflect on our practices to ensure that they are meeting the needs of our learners and align with our educational goals.”

Learner Impact

Teachers observed how teaching for creativity had a profound impact on learners' confidence and engagement. Participation in creative activities often revealed new strengths and abilities in learners, transforming their classroom presence and interaction.

“We witnessed some of our least confident children blossom and become the most animated during those sessions. Teachers remarked on the remarkable transformation, seeing a side of these children that they had never seen before.”

Preparing learners for an uncertain future was also highlighted as a key impact. Teachers aim to equip learners with skills that will help them navigate future challenges and the approaches adopted in the projected help think about ways that this could be embedded into teaching and learning.

“We want our learners to be prepared for a future that even we, as teachers, can't fully predict. Instilling creativity in them is essential for navigating this ever-changing world.”

“Problem-solving is my top priority. If learners develop strong problem-solving skills, they will be better equipped to handle whatever challenges come their way in the next decade.”

Teachers also discussed how creative learning fosters personal development, allowing learners to approach new experiences and challenges with confidence.

“Our goal is to nurture confident learners who become leaders in their own educational journeys.”

Creative learning also enhances learners' engagement and enjoyment, fostering a greater sense of freedom, expression, fun, and inclusion.

“Our pupils show increased engagement and enjoyment in their learning through creative activities.”

“The sense of freedom and expression fostered by creative learning leads to a more enjoyable educational experience for our learners.”

“Inclusive creative practices ensure that all pupils feel included and able to participate fully.”

Furthermore, creative learning strengthens relationships.

“Creative learning helps build stronger relationships between pupils and staff, fostering a supportive and collaborative atmosphere.”

Conclusion

Teachers' insights highlight that teaching for creativity involves embracing open-ended, child-led learning and creating environments where learners can freely explore and express themselves. The findings also illustrate the ongoing challenges and opportunities in aligning creative practices with curriculum requirements and assessment frameworks. Ultimately, to shift towards more creative school cultures, teachers emphasise the need for their schools to commit to longitudinal investigations that can deeply impact curriculum development and learner creativity.

Over the past three years, many teachers feel they have been given the opportunity to engage in such longitudinal investigations. As a result, they believe they are now able

to share these findings more widely within their schools, thereby further influencing curriculum development, knowledge, and understanding.

“I think we are at the point now where we need to progress this across the school and more widely with more teachers to ensure it sustainability.

I know I, and my colleagues who have worked on this project with me, have all seen and developed our practices, it's been so good to have this insight and work with the partners. But now it's about how this becomes more embedded across the school. How can we share this more with SLT and leadership.”

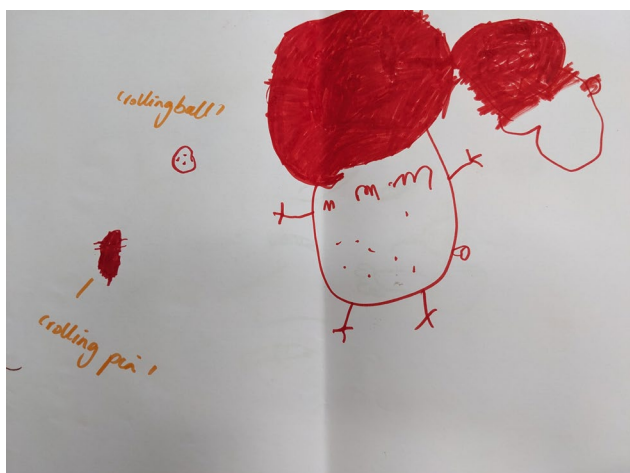
CREATIVE LEARNING



To understand learners' perceptions of the creative sessions, we conducted focus groups in three of the participating schools. This approach mirrored the river of experience methodology used with teachers in year one. In this approach, we created a river scene to visually represent the learners' journeys and experiences. We collated images of the children's experiences working with the creative partners and teachers, offering a way for learners to reflect on their participation. These visual representations were accompanied by a range of creative tasks to accommodate learners who preferred non-verbal expression.

Learners for the focus groups were selected by their teachers using convenience sampling to ensure that appropriate permissions were in place. In total, we conducted six focus groups across the three schools with 50 learners. Each focus group was audio recorded and then transcribed by hand for analysis. The focus groups followed a structured schedule comprising two main parts: Creative Journeys and Creative Processes.

For the river of experience, we walked with the group along the river scene which included, printed images of activities they had taken part in. This helped elicit memories of the sessions. As children responded, either through words or facial expressions, key words and ideas were scribed on paper by the researchers and placed on the river. These were then further discussed with the children. The children were then invited to draw or write about their "wow" moments and place these on the river. This allowed them to reflect on and express the most memorable and impactful activities. We also explored a diverse range of words related to creative processes. These words had been collated from the teacher reflections, school slides, and learners' previous descriptions of creativity from years one and two. The children were asked to select the terms they felt were most relevant to their creative experiences and discuss their significance. This approach aimed to gain deeper insights into how they perceive and understand creativity.



Analysis of Creative Processes

Table 5 presents the series of words collated from teacher reflections, school slide and learner focus groups from years one and two.

Playfulness Intuition Experimentation Exploration Reflection	Imagination Risk-Taking Expression Curiosity Inquisitiveness
Critical Thinking Independence Collaboration Teamwork Self-Regulation	Observing Embodied Sensory Uncertainty Challenges
Finding Solutions Generating New Ideas Understanding Diverse Perspectives Persistence Empathy	Emotional Expression Physical Expression Communication Resilience Open-Mindedness

Table 5 - Words collated from teacher reflections, school slide and learner focus groups from years one and two.

In our analysis of chosen words from this activity, the most frequently selected terms were:

- Imagination
- Playfulness
- Collaboration
- Teamwork
- Expression (Physical and Emotional)
- Risk-Taking

Further to children's descriptions of activities, they identified other creative processes central to their creative learning. These are highlighted and discussed under their subheadings below:

Imagination

The children recalled how acting out historical roles, like gods and goddesses, helped them connect with the subject matter on a personal level. They spoke about overcoming shyness and gaining confidence through performance. Storytelling allowed them to exercise their imaginations, creating new narratives and role-playing enabled them to embody characters.

“We had fun acting out being gods and goddesses. Some people were shy, but Miss encouraged them, and they became more confident.”

“Storytelling was fun because we could use our imagination to create new stories or add to the ones we learned about. It was different from just writing.”

“I liked pretending to be a Greek god or goddess. It was different from just learning about them from a book because we got to act out their actions.”

“Using our imagination and not talking during the games.”

“Using our imagination to become different characters.”

“Using imagination: it means something that’s not real.”

Children also took the concepts learned in class and applied them in their play at home, further integrating their new knowledge into everyday life.

“After learning about ancient gods, I took the ideas and made up some games to play with my brother at home. We acted out some of the myths.”

Playfulness

Closely linked to imagination was playfulness. Bruner (1975) advocated a playful approach as a route to foster creativity, as it is not bound by the strict rules of reality and is freed from social pressures. Torrance and Saftir (1989) also consider play as central to being able to ‘make the creative leap’ (p.1), because learners are allowed to take more risks as play can be cancelled if the situation proves to be problematic (Cropley, 2001). The children’s experience of play, such as dressing up, acting out stories, storytelling, play games, making up games and activities, engaged them in imaginative scenarios and playful rituals which extended their understanding of creative learning.

“I really enjoyed the practical lessons where we didn’t just write but did activities like making songs or acting out stuff. It made learning fun and memorable

“We heard different stories as well as acted them out.”

“We pretended to go to different cities.”

“Playfulness made learning feel like a game.”

“There was this giant ... the beads made him powerful ... we dressed up ... we were pretending.”

“I liked when we went to Scotland. I don’t normally hear stories about mythical creatures, harps, and dragons.”

“We pretended to go there ... we saw lots of different statues.”

“I liked dressing up ... we heard different stories and acted them out in our classroom.”

“I liked working with someone ... I get to learn what they can do.”
“Super-duper fun to become someone else.”

Risk-Taking

As noted by Cropley (2001) this playfulness enabled learners to move beyond considerations of right and wrong and take more creative risks. For the children, the imaginative, playful, embodied experiences enabled them to explore, experiment, and take risks without fear of failure.

“I didn’t worry about getting it wrong.”

“I just gave it a go.”

“It didn’t matter if I done the wrong thing, I just tried.”

Collaboration and Teamwork

The children also valued collaborative activities emphasising teamwork as a central component of creative learning. They noted the importance of sharing ideas and supporting one another, often extending their friendships.

“Working in teams to create ideas. We had to share ideas and support each other.”

“We actually do teamwork in a lot of stuff.”

“Teamwork: working with Years 3, 4 and 5.”

“I made new friends.”

Extension of Learning into other Subjects

Furthermore, the creative pedagogies used in these lessons spilled over into other subjects, demonstrating the interdisciplinary benefits of such an approach. The children talked about how they were applying their new skills in other lessons.

“We used the creativity from our Greek mythology lessons in other subjects.”

“Learning new things is linked to my maths ... like multiples and fractions.”

“It was different from just learning about them from a book because we got to act out their actions.”

Expression (Physical and Emotional)

Creative teaching approaches provided the children with a variety of ways to express their thoughts and feelings. Children particularly described the impact of different forms of creative expression and communication, such as the physical and emotional. They enjoyed using their bodies to convey their thoughts and feelings.

“Creating moves and dances. We used our bodies to show what we were thinking and feeling.”

“Moving our hands.”

“Making movements.”

“Creating movements and dances.”

“Creeping as quiet as a mouse.”

Sign language and other forms of non-verbal communication also played a significant role in these activities, promoting a deeper understanding of how to convey ideas without words.

Child: “We used sign language to talk to each other during the games.”

Researcher: “Can you tell me more about that?”

Child: “Yeah! We used sort of like sign language, like to talk but not to talk if you know what I mean, during the games. It was cool not to speak.”

Researcher: That sounds interesting! In what ways did you ‘talk but not talk’ to one another?”

Child: “We had to think of ways to show what we wanted to say with our faces and not just use words. We also did a lot of moving about and watched each other.”

Other children shared:

“Communicating without speaking.”

“Using and moving your bodies ... [they can recall warm-up and perform the key moves for the researcher, other children start to join in and laugh, they all remember specific moves].”

“We had to copy him ... like copycats.”

Beyond the physical and emotional, the children also described creativity as a deeply embodied experience.

“Moving in slow motion ... lots of running and jogging.”

“Communicating without speaking.”

“Using and moving your bodies.”

“Making movements.”

“Making something without talking.”

Further to this they also noted the importance of music, artefacts and props which allowed them to embody characters or emotions.

“I liked the scary, fun, silent music.”

“Toys, masks, glasses, bells.”

“I was nervous.”

“We don’t talk ... not when the music is playing.”

“Sneaky music means you have to move like this [starts to move around the room].”

Critical Reflection

For many of the children, although they did not select the term ‘critical reflection’, their explanations of their process could be aligned to this. First, they described their newfound abilities to debate and critique. Debating honed their critical thinking and communication skills, as they had to articulate and defend their points of view.

“Debating was exciting because we had to argue our points.”

“We had to think about what we wanted to say and then make an argument.”

“The teachers asked us our options a lot and we had to think about what we wanted to do.”

Central to working in this way was the supportive and encouraging environment created by the practitioners and teachers. This helped the children feel comfortable and confident in exploring new creative expressions.

“So, kind! [Re: Creative Practitioners].”

Problem solving

Creativity was also seen as a problem-solving activity. The children expressed a sense of accomplishment and confidence that comes from navigating challenges and discovering solutions.

“To figure things out.”

“You can never go wrong.”

“You’ve figured something out.”

“I felt proud when we figured out what we wanted to do and then perform it.”



Enjoyment

It was evident in the focus groups that children enjoyed the sessions. In these groups the children expressed a sense of excitement and anticipation for the sessions.

“Happy because we get to do lots of different things.”

“I’m always buzzing.”

“Excited and happy like I really want to do it.”

“Excited and happy... I can’t wait until 2:30.”

“Happy ... we get to have lots of fun.”

“Happy ... lots of fun stuff.”

“Thrilled ... my heart was always racing.”

“Happy when it makes you laugh it makes me so happy because it’s so silly.”

“We should have more lessons like this.”

For some, the role of the sessions was not excitement but providing a calming space that contrasted with their usual classroom experiences.

“Calm, peace, and quiet. It’s way better for me.”

“Calm ... I like the peace and quiet ... I can concentrate in these sessions.”

Additionally, the activities sparked a range of emotions, from amazement to laughter, further underscoring the enjoyment and positive impact of the sessions.

“Amazing.”

“Funny.”

“Crazy.”

“Amazing.”

“When someone tells stories I really enjoy it.”

Conclusion

The children's definitions of creativity provide a varied understanding. While they recognised the importance of imagination, teamwork, collaboration, as noted here:

“When you’re building something.”

“When you’re putting your own ideas in.”

“Learning new stuff in fun ways.”

“Using imagination: it means something that’s not real.”

They also highlight more affective and embodied qualities, such as movement and feelings:

“Communicating without speaking.”

“Using and moving your bodies.”

“Making movements.”

These reflections highlight how creativity for the children is not just about cognition but also how it manifests physically, through gestures, actions, and physicality. The children's definitions of creativity reveal a multifaceted understanding that encompasses both cognitive and embodied experiences.



CONCLUSION

Over the past three years, our Collaborative has sought to investigate the question:

How can empowering teachers to develop creative pedagogies facilitate an environment in which learners are enabled to flourish and fulfil their creative potential?

This report has documented key aspects of the relationship between working with creative practitioners, the development of teaching for creativity resulting from this collaboration, and insights into diverse notions of creative learning. Within the partnerships established between schools and creative practitioners, we have begun to identify recurring features of creative classrooms, domains, experiences, relationships, scaffolds, processes, ideas, and affects. The evaluative process has not only equipped learners, teachers, and practitioners with greater awareness of their own creativities, but has broadened existing understandings of creativity adopted in scholarly and pedagogical literature (e.g., Lucas & Spencer, 2017). Below are a series of key findings from this collaborative.

Multimodal Communication

The collaborative has highlighted the importance of multimodal communication. Through collaborating with creative practitioners, teachers and learners have been encouraged to explore new dimensions of creativity that transcend traditional cognitive and verbal expressions. Creativity was expressed not only through words but also through gestures, body language, facial expressions, and movement. This richness in communication opened diverse perspectives of creative learning and creative understanding, promoting a broader and more inclusive approach to creativity in the classroom. As PISA (2023) notes, it is important to understand not only what learners learn but how they learn. As suggested by this teacher:

“...the collaborative has empowered me to look at creative development differently and think about the ways that I plan for creativity to happen to ensure that all types of creative expression can flourish.”

Embodied Creativity

Furthermore, learners and teachers explored creativity through their emotions and physical actions, forging deeply embodied experiences. This approach highlighted the importance of embodied knowledge and the role of physicality in creative processes, moving beyond traditional cognitive-centric models. These non-verbal, physical, and sensory interactions transcended formal linguistic expressions in the traditional classroom. This was especially significant for learners who found verbal communication challenging, providing them with alternative means to express themselves and engage in creative processes that are often unseen in conventional mainstream classrooms.

Slow Pedagogy

Resonating with notions of slow knowledge and pedagogy (Clark, 2022), the collaborative embraced a patient and reflective approach to the development of teaching for creativity and creative learning. This slow pedagogy allowed teachers and learners to linger over different feelings, sensations, personas, and rhythms, fostering a deeper and more meaningful engagement with creative processes.

Spanning three years, the longitudinal nature of the Creativity Collaborative was crucial in facilitating this slow and deliberate exploration. Such an extended period was necessary to deeply investigate these practices and initiate cultural shifts within schools. By affording teachers and learners ample time to observe, engage with, and reflect on creative practices, the collaborative enabled a profound acknowledgment and integration of these creative approaches. This deliberate pacing will ensure that these explorations will not be superficial but become rooted in the educational culture of the schools.

Addressing school challenges and culturally relevant curriculum

Working with creative practitioners played a pivotal role in addressing school challenges and 'wicked problems'. Exploring challenges through creative teaching approaches enabled schools to adopt new outlooks on pedagogical practices, revitalise the curriculum, and provide opportunities for both teachers and learners to explore innovative practices. Many of the projects within the collaborative were also tailored to meet the localised needs of the schools, making the learning culturally relevant. This focus on school-specific needs and cultures was empowering for learners, as it made the curriculum more relatable and engaging. By connecting learning to the learners' own experiences and communities, the projects enhanced their sense of ownership and agency.

“We just needed to have a new outlook on this topic to help make it more engaging for everyone, including me. The topic is one that has got important links to the local area, but we needed to rethink how it could be taught ... it's a lot more engaging and creative now and the creative approach to rethinking how I plan is something I will take forward.”

New Planning Mechanisms and Process-Oriented Learning

Schools embraced new planning mechanisms that centred around overarching themes with a general idea of desired outputs, while allowing the creative process to guide and direct learning. This shift in approach placed significant value on the process of creativity rather than solely focusing on the final product. By doing so, teachers could observe creativities in action, providing richer insights into learners' creative development and fostering a more collaborative pedagogical approach.

Impact on Inclusive Learner Development

The approaches developed through the collaborative have significantly contributed to a more inclusive outlook on learner development. By embracing diverse modes of creativity, these practices have catered to a range of learners, including those with specific SEND statements. However, the statistics from this collaborative underscore an urgent need

for such inclusive practices across mainstream education. Many young children remain undiagnosed, yet they benefit immensely from alternative conceptions of creativity and engagement.

Furthermore, a substantial portion of the children involved in this programme are Pupil Premium learners, highlighting the socio-economic barriers they face. By providing enriched, engaging, and supportive learning experiences, the creativity collaborative has helped in some way bridge a gap in cultural engagement and fostering a sense of belonging.

Impact on the Schools

As a result of the collaborative, significant shifts are occurring in school practices. Many schools have begun to integrate creative pedagogies into their wider school improvement plans. This strategic inclusion underscores a commitment to fostering and nurturing creativity as a core component of learning. Furthermore, the collaborative's work has encouraged schools to share creative teaching approaches more widely within their local contexts. Schools are now more open to exchanging best practices and strategies with each other, fostering a community of learning and mutual support. There has also been a noticeable rethinking of how topics are taught within the curriculum. Teachers are now more inclined to teach for creativity and consider ways in which they can plan for creative learning.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The Creativity Collaborative has provided valuable insights into teaching for creativity. Drawing from our experiences and findings over the past three years, we have formulated a series of recommendations aimed at influencing policy and practice.

A focus on diverse notions of creativity and inclusive creative learning

- Education policies and practices should promote a broader understanding of creativity that encompasses diverse forms of expression, including non-verbal and embodied communication. By embracing wider notions of what it means to be a creative learner, we can better support all children. Additionally, professional development should focus on training teachers to implement and value diverse creative practices, ensuring that all forms of learner creativity are recognised and nurtured.

Resource Allocation and Support

- Adequate funding and resources should be allocated to support the implementation of creative pedagogies. Partnerships with creative practitioners should also be maintained to provide ongoing support and inspiration.

Practice: The Elliot Foundation Academy Schools

- The Elliot Foundation should explore the implementation of the 'Repertoires of Practice' and 'Creative Processes' across all schools within the Trust, including those in East Anglia and London. By extending them throughout the entire network, the Trust can ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to fostering creativity.
- The Elliot Foundation should continue to maintain and further develop its network of Creativity Collaborative Leads across the Trust. By strengthening this collaborative, the Trust can ensure ongoing professional development and support for teachers. This includes regular opportunities for collaboration, including workshops, seminars, and peer observations, to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences.
- The findings of this work should be shared with senior leadership teams across the academy trust and support put in place for senior leaders to develop their own understanding of creativity. To maximise impact, tailored support should be provided to help senior leaders deepen their understanding of creativity and its role in educational practice. This support will empower leaders to champion and implement teaching for creativity within their schools.
- The next phase of this work involves systematically integrating the evidence gathered over the three-year programme into the Trust's teaching frameworks and curriculum development strategies. This integration will ensure that creative practices are embedded into core pedagogical approaches and make sustainable impact.



THE CREATIVITY COLLABORATIVE LEGACY

To ensure the impact and sustainability of this work for the schools and learners, the collaborative has developed a toolkit. This toolkit is designed to provide practical strategies that support the continued application of the insights and practices developed throughout the project. For the collaborative, the outcome was not to create another model of creativity. Instead, the focus was on developing and offering a toolkit of approaches that schools, teachers, and learners could utilise and adapt even in the absence of creative practitioners. This toolkit was developed in the last year in partnership and had input from all stakeholders, including the children. It is hoped that this tool kit is shared widely across the Elliot Foundation Schools.

This toolkit, which is available as a separate document for classroom use, includes a variety of strategies to foster creativity and offers insights into how creativity can be valued. It is divided into two sections: Repertoires of Practice and Creative Processes. In this report, we provide an overview of the toolkit to illustrate how the learning from this project has informed its development and to highlight its impact.

Repertoires of Practice

Repertoires of Practice refer to the diverse strategies and approaches employed by creative practitioners or teachers to enhance creativity in the classroom. These practices create an environment that fosters teaching for creativity and creative learning. Like Thompson and Hall (2017), we identified practices that were rooted in key characteristics of the approaches to pedagogy by the creative practitioners. This, in combination with knowledge generated from working with the teachers and learners in the Creativity Collaborative, enabled us to identify six broad themes with associated pedagogical practices. These repertoires are not meant to be explored all at once but offer teachers the potential for selective use in the development of their schemes of work. The repertoires include pedagogical approaches under specific headings highlighted below.

- **Affective**

Affective pedagogies explore ways of engaging learners through their embodied and sensory experiences, emotions, personal stories, physical expressions, and non-verbal communication. This is essential as it acknowledges and nurtures diverse ways in which creativity can be developed in the classroom.

- **Adventurous**

The notion of adventurous pedagogies highlights the importance of fostering a learning environment that values exploration and risk-taking, enabling learners to navigate uncertainty and discover new ideas.

- **Place, Space, and Environment**

Adapting and transforming physical spaces to support creative learning has been a crucial aspect in the repertoires of practice. By rearranging classroom layouts and utilising local contexts, the collaborative recognised the need to break away from traditional classroom constraints.

- **Inclusive and Ethical Approaches**

Inclusive and ethical approaches were prioritised in the collaborative. By supporting various modes of expression, including non-verbal communication, practitioners and teachers ensured that all learners, regardless of their verbal abilities or cultural backgrounds, have an equal opportunity to participate and contribute. This approach fosters a respectful and inclusive classroom culture, promoting empathy and understanding.

- **Slow and Reflective Approaches**

It was important in the development of creative pedagogies and practices to take time to observe, reflect, and adapt pedagogical approaches. By adopting a slower pace, practitioners encourage teachers and learners to notice details, think deeply, and engage in meaningful reflection. A slow pedagogy approach, which is further characterised by repetition and familiarity, helped build flexibility into lesson pacing and continuous reflection allow practitioners and teachers to adjust their pedagogical approaches based on learners' needs.

- **Partnership and Collaboration**

Partnership and collaboration were crucial for nurturing creativity as they brought together diverse perspectives and expertise from colleagues, learners, the wider school community, and creative partners. Throughout the three years a range of partnership and collaboration pedagogical approaches were explored deeply impacting teaching for creativity.

Creative Processes

In combination with the analysis of the repertoires of practice, we also identified and corroborated a list of 36 creative processes. These are shown in Table 6. These processes were explored alongside the repertoires of practice, underscoring the importance of understanding and valuing the ways in which creativity unfolds. It is hoped that teachers will be able to refer to these processes during lessons, using them to recognise and attribute diverse forms of creativity in their learners.

Analysis Playfulness Intuition Experimentation Exploration Reflection	Refinement Improvisation Imagination Risk-taking Expression Curiosity	Inquisitiveness Critical thinking Independence Collaboration Teamwork Self-regulation
Observing Embodied Sensory exploration Embracing uncertainty Embracing challenges Finding solutions	Generating new ideas Understanding diverse perspectives Persistence Empathy Emotional expression Physical expression	Communication Resilience Open-mindedness Being responsive to others Being adaptable Embracing discomfort

Table 6 - Creative processes.

Concluding thoughts and thanks

In conclusion, the evidence collected through our creativity collaborative profoundly impacts perceptions of creativity, emphasising the necessity for a more diverse and inclusive approach to allow learners to flourish. This project has exemplified partnership working, fostering deep, longitudinal reflection in and on practice. As a result, the work promises a legacy and sustainability in promoting teaching for creativity.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the schools, teachers, learners and creative practitioners who graciously welcomed researchers into their classrooms and sessions, and generously shared their insights. I would also like to thank, Dr Elizabeth MacGregor and Dr Emma Nenadic who over the three years worked with me on the project. Although they transitioned to different roles over the three years, their contributions have been integral to the analysis and reflection process.

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