

## Signature Pedagogies – Summary Report

### Background

Members of the Signature Pedagogies project team have been researching the impact of the creativity agenda in classrooms since 2007. The research reported here builds on this work – in particular on the “Creative School Change” project funded by Creative Partnerships from 2007 to 2009, and on reflections about the relationship between arts practice and pedagogy developed during a 2010 evaluation of the RSC/Warwick University Stand up for Shakespeare Project.

### Methods.

Our project used observation and interview to develop rich descriptions of creative practice. We conducted observation in two ways - through researcher visits in which detailed field notes were kept, and by filming two days when creative practitioners were working with students. In all, we observed activities in twelve schools, six primary and six secondary. The primary locations were all in the Midlands while the secondary were in and around London and the south of England. In primary schools we observed three storymakers, one storyteller, one dancer and one visual and movement artist. In the secondary schools, we observed work on radio, physical theatre, visual art, dance, media and creative activities such as problem-solving. Based on these visits, we have written eight case studies. Other material – for instance on physical theatre at Delius School, London – is presented in other sections of the report.

### Our framing concept: Pedagogy

Pedagogy is often taken to refer to techniques for organising teaching and learning in particular classrooms. This is quite a recent emphasis. Historically, ‘pedagogy’ has been used in a much broader way, to include relationships, conversations, learning environments, rules, norms and culture – within the classroom, the school and the wider community setting. It has had as much to do with ‘ways of being’ as ‘ways of knowing’ and has involved dimensions of ethical value as well as dimensions of technique. This is the meaning of pedagogy with which we’ve operated.

We take it that there are many different kinds of pedagogy, that aim deliberately to teach ‘habits of mind’ - traditions, conventions and mores. We think that pedagogies based around creative practice, and involving creative practitioners, are one distinctive kind of pedagogy. We think of this distinctiveness as a special quality, a defining signature.

Of course, this is not the only pedagogy at work in the school – it is not even the dominant one. That place is occupied by what we call a **default pedagogy**: in England the default

lesson should begin with an outline of a curriculum objective; students are expected to understand how this objective will assist them to achieve a specified level of attainment set out in a curriculum framework. Teachers therefore plan lessons around particular objectives, and exercises and tests are designed in order to determine what level they have achieved.

The Creative Partnerships [CP] programme (2002-9) was an institutional initiative which set out to disrupt the default. It was not the only one on offer at the time - we can think for example of the Inquiring Minds curriculum development project, eco-schools, forest schools, Philosophy for Children movement, Italian and Danish approaches to early childhood education, many of which were also taken up by schools engaged in CP. CP was however unique among these 'opening-up' interventions, because it was the only programme which brought a substantial new workforce of adults into schools. Our project explores some of the pedagogical impacts that this workforce has had.

#### Further into pedagogy

One way of thinking about the differences between default and alternative pedagogies is supplied by the UNESCO commission chaired by Jacques Delors, which first reported in 1995 and has organised follow-up activities since (UNESCO 1995). The commission insists that the work of the school needs to be understood multi-dimensionally. To this end, it offers four concepts, which we have deployed in this project: learning to know, learning to be, learning to do, learning to work with others. We suggest that, in each of these four dimensions, the signature pedagogies developed by creative practitioners, and by teachers with a similar orientation, are significantly different from the pedagogies of the mainstream. To do this, our report works through each of Delors' categories, constructing a series of case studies, intended to illuminate different aspects of creative pedagogies.

#### Learning to Know

'Learning to know' is defined as 'combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects' (1995: 37). It is about breadth and also specialisation, about the mastery of learning tools more than the acquisition of bodies of knowledge, about 'stimulating intellectual curiosity, sharpening critical faculties and the capacity to reason, developing concentration and memory. Underpinning these capacities is 'the pleasure that can be derived from understanding knowledge and discovery' (<http://www.unesco.org/delors/ltoknow.htm>). Our case studies of the Art & Design department at Spencer High School, and of the storyteller Tunde, at work in two Midlands primary schools exemplify this aspect of the commission's model. Spencer provided an unusually clear example of a long-term project of art education, very strongly rooted in the school's identity, in the disciplinary resources of a well-defined artistic tradition, and possessing high status.

Tunde's sessions likewise drew from a tradition – that of public story-telling and oral narrative. Through the layering of autobiographical information, folk and family tales, as well as through the direct teaching of visualization and breathing techniques, the artist offered the children resources to use in managing their own imaginative and emotional lives in the present and in the future.

#### Learning to do

'Learning to do' relates to formal and informal, social and work experiences; it is defined broadly as acquiring 'the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams' (1995:37). The emphasis is also on developing competence, through personal commitment and individual initiative (<http://www.unesco.org/delors>). It is about the individual skills and dispositions in the context of social and economic engagement. Badger Grove, one of our secondary schools, whose students were involved – alongside professional dancers - in a dance project, illuminated the depth of students' involvement with a pedagogy of this kind. The experience of being with a professional offered a different kind of relationship to an adult-expert role model, in which students were plunged into the working world of dance, with its clear but not necessarily articulated judgments about 'good' and 'bad' performance, and its demands for concentration, alertness and – in Delors' phrase – teamwork. The 'collegial pedagogy' of the team created a kind of buy-in from students that was different to their approach to more everyday school activities. The 'Creative Olympics' we observed at St Hilda's School gave rise to a similar, intense degree of participation and involvement. Very much a project about 'learning to do', it involved planning and preparing, consulting and negotiating, executing a plan, evaluating and celebrating its successes.

#### Learning to live together

Learning to live together involves above all the 'discovery of other people'. Schools should prompt 'unaccustomed forms of action' that enable people to 'transcend the routines of their personal lives and attach value to what they have in common'. At Larwood Primary School a story-making project encouraged 'discovery' about people in the immediate community through engagement in a collaborative creative project – of a sort that others have termed the development of 'texts of our lives'. Accompanying discovery were other more specific kinds of learning. A number of important literacy processes were explicitly covered: devising interview questions, conducting an interview, transcribing key pieces of text, composing and editing a narrative that was not only to be performed but also had to stand alone as a printed text after the interview event. Writing up the stories required attention to the narratives at the level of syntax, rhythm, word selection, plot development, setting, character development and dialogue. Children had to work together in small groups for protracted periods of time, far longer than the usual lesson length. They had to meet a timeline and produce a real text for a real audience, many of whom were not dispassionate observers but were intimately

involved in the events being narrated. The project created, as much as it reflected, values held in common.

In a London nursery school, Stanley, a visual artist, worked with parents to devise structures and habitats in which their children could play. Across a range of cultures, and across wide income differentials, Stanley offered a vision of play as something shared, and set up long sessions of reflection on play and its meanings and possibilities that involved all participating parents as equals in a common enterprise. His was a project based on learning to live together through 'discovering' other people and creating a 'new spirit' through engagement in unaccustomed forms of action.

### Learning to be

The fourth pillar, 'learning to be', is about 'every person's complete development - mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality'.

Jim works as a story-teller at a Midlands Nursery School. He mobilised drama tools – improvisation and performance – in combination with writing composition competencies – developing character, plot and context – in order to lead the group through a creative process, creating a context in which the children learned how to put their individual imaginings, understandings, experiences and interests into a collaborative authoring process. There was an important in-the-moment-ness of much of what Jim did which contrasted with the orientation towards the demands of the future that characterises so many aspects of school life. In Jim's work, with very young children, we were reminded of Raymond Williams discussion of a 'structure of feeling' - practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity" (Williams, 1977: 132).

Iona, an environmental artist working with a Year Six group in another Midlands primary school, likewise worked against the pressured grain of Year Six experience. Taking her pupils to an allotment, talking much about her own life and art, Iona sought to emphasise the abundance of nature; the importance of self expression; the possibility of using your ingenuity and creativity to make something out of nothing. Working with found materials, Iona's pupils tried to create everyday works of art, showing alternative ways in which a creative, fulfilled life could be lived.

### Pedagogic Practices

The sketches above will have indicated that the models of learning developed in the classrooms we studied are as much about different ways of being as about alternative kinds of knowledge. Like the standardised curriculum that they rub against and challenge, they are thoroughly value-laden. We suggest that they represented a different way of thinking about

teaching and learning, most notably in the way that they build sociality and stress the capacities of young people to 'become somebody'.

Across all the sites we visited, we observed a number of *pedagogic practices*, which offered a concrete realisations of the underlying principles of learning suggested by the projects. Thus:

- they intervened in the routines of the school, setting up 'occasions' that departed from normal patterns of teaching and learning, sometimes to the point of being absurdist and carnivalesque
- they introduced different patterns of classroom discourse – from lifestory, to disciplinary codings, to humour
- they used the resources of the everyday – recycled material, common knowledges – to create artefacts, set up conversations, establish that the experience that pupils brought with them to school was central to the possibilities of learning
- they managed the interpersonal life of the classroom differently. They had a universalist approach to inclusion, in which 'differentiation' played little part. They encouraged choice and agency. They were willing to accelerate or suspend the time of learning. They gave permission to play. They valorised the collective endeavour of pupils.

## Conclusion

Our research suggests that the differences between artists and teachers stem from their positioning and the expectations and roles associated with this. Teachers, because of their position within the institutional context of school, work in a complex frame of national policy, public expectations and local institutional interpretations of policy and educational purposes. They have ongoing responsibilities for ensuring that children meet mandated curriculum outcomes. This, as a considerable body of research suggests, frames what it is that they are able to do. What they are **able** to do may in fact exceed what it is **possible** to do within their particular context. While it is easy to suggest for example, the teachers might adopt a universalist approach to inclusion, as we have suggested that the artists we saw did, it is difficult to see how this might happen in a context where national and international policy frames inclusion quite differently.

Artists however arrive in schools as visitors, even if they work as artists in residence, their position is as an institutional 'other'. They bring with them frames of reference and purposes from their life worlds, and as they and teachers work together they create more and less stable time/spaces where their frames and purposes produce new practices. [The report is emphatic on this point: pedagogic practices – the 'visible' and 'audible' of the classroom – are](#)

informed by deeper understandings. To be productive, classroom reform must take this into account: reform must relate to 'frames' and 'purposes' as much as to practices.

We suggest that there will always be a role for artists to play in schools, as the positions of artist and teacher are not the same, not interchangeable. We have suggested that artists have much to bring to the renewal of pedagogy in the English school. To what extent teachers will be encouraged to admit them to the conversation is a question upon which much depends.

#### References

UNESCO Task force on education for the twenty-first century (1995) 'Learning, the treasure within' <http://www.unesco.org/delors/>

Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature* OUP Oxford.