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WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE UK'S 'CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS' PROGRAMME

**about how co-operation between cultural partners and schools can affect
pupil learning and school culture?**

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article, "Creative Partnerships" refers to a programme that ran in England from 2002 to 2011. The programme operated in around 2,500 schools each year, involving around 60,000 teachers and $\frac{3}{4}$ million pupils. Although it was discontinued by the UK Government in 2011, the practice that underpinned it has now been used to develop and implement programmes in a number of other countries, including Germany, Lithuania, Norway, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Pakistan and Wales. Much co-operation between schools and cultural partners, is intended to provide pupils with cultural experiences, such as visiting a museum, attending a concert or having poets reading from their work while visiting schools. However, in the case of CCE's programme, Creative Partnerships (CP), and a number of other significant international programmes with which CCE is associated, such the primary purpose is to improve pupil learning, enhance teaching practice and drive school development. But how successful have these programmes been in realizing these effects and how are they achieved?

The Creative Partnerships programme places artists and other creative professionals in schools. In the first instance, the programme allocates a "Creative Agent" whose role is to work strategically with teachers to devise projects which address specific educational needs that the school has identified. To deliver these projects, the "Creative Agent" will identify and recruit a variety of Creative Practitioners, mainly artists, who would actually

deliver the projects in partnership with the teachers. Central to the programme was the idea that the Creative Agents and the Creative practitioners were not in the school as teachers. The teachers, who were fully involved in the delivery of all projects, remained the teachers. The artists were working in schools as artists. CCE works with artists across all artistic disciplines, including but not limited to video/film, photography, painting, music, dance, and theatre.

CCE has always taken research and evaluation very seriously. Over the decade the programme ran in England, a substantial body of independent research was commissioned, resulting in an on-line archive of research reports containing 146 documents. Most of these were either produced or commissioned by CCE. These include: eleven summary documents with exemplars; a series of twelve literature reviews; and 46 research reports. These reports use either one or a combination of statistical, survey-based, case study and qualitative methodologies. They explore or evaluate CP practice in relation to various dimensions: student attainment, behaviour and attendance; parental engagement and community resilience; learning and creative learning; teachers, creative practitioners and pedagogy; school ethos, wellbeing and processes of school change; and the creative economy. This database therefore provides a rich source of evidence from which we can draw conclusions about the impact of these approaches.

2. IS THERE A DISTINCTIVE APPROACH WHICH CULTURAL PARTNERS BRING TO THE CLASSROOM?

The first question that needs to be addressed is the extent to which cultural partners bring a distinctive pedagogy. If they merely replicate techniques and strategies already being deployed by teachers in the classroom, then there will be no distinguishable change in learning.

The most significant research in this area was undertaken by the team at Nottingham University, in their report "Signature Pedagogies"¹ and the Institute of Education at Cambridge University in their report "The Impact of Creative Partnerships on Well Being."² Through the close observation of a large number of learning environments, these researchers developed the concept of the "High Functioning Classroom" to define a set of characteristics in the management of learning environments which appeared to have the most powerful impact on the learning of young people. This revealed that an approach which ensures that pupils are challenged rather than directed, that presents learning relevant to their lives, that ensures pupils are physically, emotionally and socially engaged in their learning and which focuses on reflection, generates an environment in which learning is deepest. It places pupils at the heart of the learning process, ensuring that their observations, their histories, their communities and their perceptions are central to their learning.

These researchers also confirmed that artists and cultural partners introduce these ways of engaging and interacting with pupils and in so doing define a pedagogy which is significantly different from that being deployed in many

classrooms. For instance, an artist introducing medieval Czech history to a group in grade 6 might begin by taking the pupils on a walk through the forest to forage for the ingredients of the paints that medieval artists used to make their paintings. They would then get the children to paint small paintings of their friends using only these materials, and then visit the Prague City gallery to study paints from this period to discover what this tells them about life in medieval Prague. In this way they change how they use make of physical space for learning using the spaces in, around and beyond the schools in new and different ways. They use time more flexibly, they encourage cross school and cross-curricula work and ensure that the themes and topics deal with real life issues and concerns.

This brings about changes in the way pupils learn, but can also change what counts as learning. Roles in the classroom are often modified, with pupils having more opportunity to be the teacher and the teacher frequently becoming a learner. The cultural partner plays an important part in making sure that these role changes are managed comfortably and safely.

The same researchers also showed that this produces significant improvements in the way that pupils behave and perform and this in turn encourages the teachers to adopt new approaches. In this way, the artists bring about changes in how the pupils learn, not only when they are interacting with the pupils, but by stimulating changes in the pedagogical practice being deployed once the artist has departed. This is achieved through a carefully managed process.

- Firstly, the teacher experiences the new approaches by working in close partnership with the cultural partner. In this phase, the cultural partner introduces new skills, ideas, techniques and contacts, creating space in the school day for teachers to explore creativity.
- Secondly, the teachers consolidate their learning through a process of reflection and experimentation led by the cultural partner who also encourages the teachers to share and collaborate with their colleagues.
- In the third and most crucial phase however, teachers must use their professional capacity to translate what they have learnt into pedagogical principles and plan for it to be integrated into their pedagogical approach. The researchers also show that whole school change takes place when the learning from this final stage in cascaded through the school. What is often the most important element in this final stage is that teachers come to change their ways of seeing their pupils, often letting them come into focus for the first time.

3. WHAT CHANGES ARE APPARENT IN THE PUPILS WHEN THIS APPROACH IS TAKEN?

The biggest and most significant impact on pupils that was observed in the research reports and evaluations was on student attendance. There were educationally significant improvements in attendance on all measures. There

are reductions in absences due to sickness, reductions in unauthorised absences, reductions in authorised absences and reductions in suspensions and exclusions.

There is a positive impact on test scores and other formal measuring such as exam. This can be seen across all grades, at all ages and across all subjects. Overall these are relatively modest, although they are statistically significant. However, individual school with the highest commitment to creative learning have reported much larger improvements in academic results.

Schools consistently report significant improvements in pupil cooperation and their ability to collaborate among themselves. This is indeed a major focus of many projects, as many schools see the "high functioning classroom" as an opportunity to address quite deep seated social problems within schools. They find that the approaches taken by cultural partners bring very significant improvements in the social atmosphere in the school. This has continued to be consistently observed by CCE in their international work. In most European countries, teachers have been reporting a general decline in standards of behaviour and social skills among pupils. However, those who have worked within Creative Partnerships programmes have found that the approach taken by cultural partners has a very positive effect on pupil behaviour. It is important to remember that a positive social atmosphere in school is a pre-requisite of effective learning.

The research also provides convincing evidence that the vast majority of schools claim significant benefits for children and young people in terms of the wider "soft skills" associated with citizenship, well-being and employment – a sense of efficacy and agency; the ability to have ideas and carry them through; the capacity to express oneself and to communicate with a wider range of people using different genres and media; learning greater respect for and appreciation of others; having a greater sense of personal satisfaction and happiness. Overall teachers also believe that pupils who have participated in the programme are more enthusiastic and engaged in learning when creative approaches are taken.

It is also interesting to note that some of the reports indicate that relations between pupils and parents improve as the work pupils undertake with cultural partners is often more visible than other school work and is more consistently shared with parents. This gives parents a window into the learning life of their children helping parents to understand better what is expected of their children and the progress they are making. International studies consistently indicate that the predictor of good academic progress among pupils is the level of engagement of parents. The analysis undertaken for CCE by the Centre for Primary Literacy in their research publication "Their learning becomes your journey"⁵ showed that pupil involvement in Creative Partnerships did indeed have a significant impact on levels of parental engagement in pupil learning.

4. WHAT IMPACT DOES THIS HAVE ON SCHOOLS?

As a consequence of the improvement in pupil learning, attendance and behaviour, the impact that these approaches have on schools are very significant. This is because schools learn from the experience of working with cultural partners and apply this learning to the organisation of the school. There are many ways in which this becomes visible.

Firstly, there are changes in the way learning is organised. This is seen in the increase in cross-curricula work and greater collaboration between departments and teachers. It also sees schools looking more carefully at how they use space, the development of more flexible or specialised learning spaces and the more effective use of external spaces. There are changes in how the work of pupils is displayed. Different sets of pupils have their presence recognised in the schools through the use of display. What is displayed comes to reflect quite deep shifts in school ethos and priorities. For instance there is often a reduction in the display of what was made, or what was won, in favour of displays which reveal what was learnt. There are often also significant changes in the way timetables in the school operate.

There are also changes in the way that learning is assessed, and indeed a broader understanding of what constitutes learning. In 2012, CCE published a report which examined definitions of creativity. In this report, the authors identified five "habits of mind"⁴ and fifteen sub habits which seem central to creative thinking. They are:

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| 1. Inquisitive | Wondering and Questioning
Exploring and Investigating
Challenging assumptions |
| 2. Persistent | Tolerating uncertainty
Sticking with difficulty
Daring to be different |
| 3. Imaginative | Playing with possibilities
Making connections
Using intuition |
| 4. Disciplined | Crafting and Improving
Developing techniques
Reflecting critically |

5. Collaborative	Cooperating appropriately Giving and receiving feedback Sharing the "product"
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Thomas Tallis secondary school⁵ in London has taken the creative "habits of mind" developed by CCE and established them as a tool for all pupils to use to understand and assess their own learning. This academic year they will also launch a new "app" designed by school staff which pupils will be able to download in order to carry out their own self assessments. There are also changes in who carries out evaluation, with pupils playing an increasing role. In many schools, both primary and secondary, pupils played the role of assessors, evaluating a wide range of activities. In a few schools, pupils became observers in class, monitoring learning and sharing their observations with the teachers. Generally, teachers, although apprehensive at first, welcome these approaches and found that the observations of pupils gave them valuable insights into pupil learning and teaching practice.

There are also changes in school organisation, with a much greater "spread" of leadership. This effect can be seen at both ends of the spectrum. At one end, cultural partners' advocacy of young people's views and opinions is one of the more confronting aspects of the Creative Partnership programme yet, according to researchers, is highly valued by teachers and schools. Cultural partners supported staff to engage in what were sometimes challenging conversations and urged them to take students' views into account in any reform they undertook. CCE commissioned research shows that students were highly encouraged by opportunities to give an opinion, design and manage activities and to become involved in ongoing governance.

However, cultural partners were also trained to understand that pupils' voice is effective only when properly supported. They knew that:

- in order for students to have voice, they need to be equipped with the skills, understandings and confidence to "have their say".
- in order to be reflective, students needed the capacity to understand their own position or opinion, to consider it in light of the position and opinions of others and have the skills and confidence to be able to voice these positions and opinions.
- In order to develop and grow young people also needed to be aware of global and local cultural issues, to understand them and also actively participate in communities

Cultural partners have shown themselves to be adept at designing consultation processes which give pupils these skills and understandings. The quality and depth of the ideas that emerged from the pupils as a result deeply impress the teaching staff and ensure that these practices were embedded in the management of the school. A particularly striking example of this was when the Norwegian Government commissioned CCE to train

Norwegian artists to create and lead a consultation process with young people in Norway regarding the future development of the Norwegian Government's flagship cultural education programme the "Cultural Rucksack". The ideas which emerged from the young people who were engaged in the consultation have been widely acclaimed and their views are having a significant impact on the development of Norwegian Government policy.⁶

But the changes in the way pupils express their views and shape decisions in school are mirrored by changes in the organisational structure of the school. For pupils to have more say, and teachers to be able to integrate their learning in their pedagogical practice, the senior management teams of schools have to be prepared to share power more broadly across the school. In many schools this led to much more democratic whole school approaches, creating a community of learning and nurturing a caring, sharing ethos across the school. In later editions of the Creative Partnership programme, such as the one's in Lithuania and the Czech republic this led to the establishment of "teachers clubs" where groups of teachers meet on a regular basis to share and discuss their practice and to plan and implement new approaches. This has encouraged an approach to learning which affords choice, is focused on creative development, is multisensory and improved the quality of relationships in the whole school community.

There are also major changes in relationships between the school, parents and the wider community. Cultural partners constantly invent new ways to get schools to engage parents. They also persuaded the schools to see their communities differently, often succeeding in moving them from seeing the community as a deficit, to a community which was asset rich and as a resource to support inclusion and enterprise. At the very least cultural partners give schools far more to share with parents and the wider community, more to offer them as audience, and more material to communicate in newsletters and through digital media.

More generally, cultural partners encourage schools to be more outward facing, inspiring teachers and pupils to learn beyond the school grounds and in the wider community. For instance, teaching geography through map making in the local community, and developing approaches to map making which record and reveal complex cultural aspects of their local community helps pupils understand the concepts which underpin geography. In one powerful example – in a school in a desperately poor neighbourhood in Karachi, Pakistan – the artist began by getting the pupils to draw their walk to school on pieces of paper. By then working to connect the drawings in order to create an overall map of the local neighbourhood, the artist was both able to get the pupils to understand map making and to extract from the pupils a wide range of perceptions of their neighbourhood and how it functioned.

In another example in a school in Norway, the teachers wanted to get their Year 7 pupils, who were nearly all from immigrant backgrounds, to engage with traditional Norwegian Culture. The artist suggested that the pupils

write together an updated version of a traditional Norwegian folk story. The story would then be broken down into short paragraphs and the pupils would take them home together with iPads and record each of their parents reading one of the paragraphs. These would then be edited together into a single video which would show a group of immigrants narrating a traditional Norwegian folk story to their children in Norwegian.

5. HOW SHOULD CULTURAL PARTNERS BE PREPARED TO WORK IN THESE WAYS WITH SCHOOLS?

CCE has invested considerable time and thought into how to prepare and support cultural partners. Between 2010 and 2011, it led a European project with partners in Austria, Holland, Sweden and England and artists from 9 countries to develop a guide for artists wishing to work in primary schools in Europe. The final document, which is available from the CCE website⁷ is a useful and practical guide for any artist in Europe wishing to prepare themselves for work in primary schools. CCE is now working on a follow-up project with EU funding which is developing a self-assessment tool for artists to use to analyse their strengths and weaknesses and to identify those areas of their artistic/educational practice which needs to be enhanced.

However, the key characteristics that a cultural partner needs to work in schools in this way can be easily explained. However, it is important to note that CCE is focussed on placing artists and other creative professionals in schools. Therefore, CCE ensures that the individual who will work in a school has the right training, and is also an artist, or has a creative practice. Many cultural organisations have dedicated education departments or staff, but this document is not concerned with their practice or the impact they have in schools. For artists working in schools, there are five key aspects to their work:

- First, they must have a strong and well-developed creative practice of their own. Working with teachers and young people must be relevant to that practice. For instance, there are artists within all art forms whose practice is deeply private and does not benefit from interaction with others. This is more likely to happen among certain writers, painters and composers. Dancers, actors, and theatre directors however far are more likely to have an intense social practice. This form of working, which is probably best described as participative practice, allows others to have a full and engaged role in the work of the artist and while the artists never ceases to be the artist, the process is more democratic and partnership-focussed.
- Second, they must be able to understand schools. For this they need strong diagnostic skills. They must be able to ask good questions, lead effective discussions and have a robust investigative approach. They must also be emotional literate and to be able to see teachers and pupils clearly, understand what motivates them and how they work. CCE has developed an analytical tool called the Creative School Development Framework, which provides cultural partners with a roadmap to steer them through the diagnosis. It encourages

them to explore the school's ethos and its style of leaderships, to understand its curriculum and defining pedagogies, to see how it prioritises and deploys its resources and how teachers are developed. This helps cultural partners focus their work on those aspects of the school which most need attention.

- Third, cultural partners have a key role to play in planning and brokering. Planning requires strong project management skills. Schools generally have poor project management skills, as these are rarely required of teachers in the normal exercise of their duties. This is why it is important for cultural partners to bring these skills to the partnership. But cultural partners will also have to be able to bring teams of people together. This will sometimes be across schools, where staff from a number of departments or grades will be required to work together, or where additional artists or specialists will be brought in from the outside the school to deliver the programme. Key to this brokering is the ability to manage relationships which merge cultures. The cultures of different departments or grades in a school often differ significantly. This is even more the case where creative professionals or others from outside the schools are drawn in to delivering a programme or project. Therefore it is important that the cultural partner has the capacity to understand the dynamics of different cultures and learns to find ways to bring them into alignment.
- Fourth, the artists will have to manage processes of change. The success of the programme or project will inevitably be judged on the extent to which it brings about positive change, and so if change is the key success criteria then an understanding of how to manage change will be important. Here the cultural partners should be familiar with theories of change, and the best change management practice. Much of this is common sense, but a set of skills and instruments to navigate the processes of change is important.
- Fifth, cultural partner must be prepared to lead the reflection and evaluation process. While head teachers, teachers, pupils, parents and the wider community will all participate in the process, and on larger programmes outside professional researchers and evaluators will provide additional support and expertise, the cultural partner is at the centre of this process. In leading the reflection and evaluation process, the cultural partner should also be careful not to do the thinking for the participants. All the participants will have to use the reflective capacities to translate the experiences they have had into long term principles which will inform the development of teaching and learning in the schools if the impact of the programme is to be sustained.

Finally, conceptions of an artist significantly impact the capacity of an artist to operate in the way described above. Sometimes, the artist is defined almost exclusively in terms of set of technical skills exercised within a deep understanding of the history of their practice. In such contexts the role of the artist can only be conceived of in terms of his/her ability to pass on the

technique or explain the history. This is quite different from the role of the artist described here, and would have no impact on pupil learning or school development. The work described here could sometimes be described as "instrumentalist" where the artist is seen as using art for some other purpose than that for which it is intended. Such belief systems are hard to overcome. For instance, such prejudices will see the artist primarily as someone who could paint a mural for the school, and that perhaps some of the children could assist in the painting and learn a little about murals in the process. However, the experience of CCE through the development and delivery of its programmes has been to come to understand the artist separately from the technical skills and histories they represent. Of course, to be a great violinist it is necessary to have exceptional technical skills and a profound understanding of the history of your art. But it is not enough and it is not the essence of what makes an artist. Great artists transcend their medium and their history and their genius lies in their ability to imagine, challenge, persist, focus and connect. It is the application of these skills which bring about the profound changes to the lives and outcomes of children and young people that CCE's researchers have observed and it is clearly these skills which are at work when the artist is helping school to imagine new ways of tackling their problems, when the artists s challenging the school to think deeply about what they have learnt from the experience, when the artist is providing the planning which allows the teachers to persist to the end of the project and when the artist is making new connections which allow the teachers to use space in their schools in new and unexpected ways.

¹ Thomson, P.; Hall, C.; Jones, K. and Sefton-Green, J.: *The Signature Pedagogies Project: Final Report*, Newcastle 2012.

² McLellan, R.; Galton, M.; Steward, S. and Page, C.: *The Impact of Creative Partnerships on the Wellbeing of Children and Young People*, Newcastle 2012.

³ Safford, K.; O'Sullivan, O.: "Their learning becomes your journey": Parents respond to Children's work in Creative Partnerships, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education 2007.

⁴ See Spencer, E.; Lucas, B. and Claxton, G.: *Progression in Creativity: developing new forms of assessment – Final Research Report*. Newcastle 2012 at <http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/progression-in-creativity-developing-new-forms-of-assessment> [22.05.2015].

⁵ View the Tallis Habits at <http://www.thomastallischool.com/tallis-habits.html> [22.05.2015].

⁶ The full report can be read at <http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/research-reports> [22.05.2015].

⁷ <http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/artists-in-creative-education> [22.05.2015].

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