

# **Creative Primary Schools: developing and maintaining pedagogy for creativity**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This micro-ethnographic study investigated pedagogy in two English primary schools, following a change of government and challenges posed by economic austerity. Unlike the previous decade's emphasis on children's curiosity and agency and valuing arts and partnership, emphasis on knowledge and attainment was now foregrounded. A two-stage National Curriculum government review (2011-2012) brought primary schools little clarity. During the review period, the authors researched two purposively chosen schools, recognised nationally for their creative approaches. This paper discusses their creative teaching and learning pedagogic practices. Three shared characteristics emerged through triangulated qualitative analysis: **co-construction**, high value placed on **children's control/ agency/ ownership**, and **high expectations in skilful creative engagement**, evident through the arts, use of integrated themes and topics, flexible time, children's immersive involvement, and attending closely to children. Thematic findings are discussed alongside unique qualities of each school's pedagogy and implications for primary education considered.*

**Key words:** pedagogy for creativity; co-construction; control; agency; ownership; creative skills

## **Creative Primary Schools: developing and maintaining pedagogy for creativity**

This paper reports findings from an interpretive study of two primary schools in England, researching how they were maintaining pedagogy for creativity. It was undertaken during a period of change in English primary education bringing a sharp shift in emphasis with respect to creativity, in comparison with the preceding decade in policy and practice. To set the context, characteristics of the creative decade are first discussed, the new direction articulated and then the focus of the study introduced.

### **The creative decade**

Early 21<sup>st</sup> century primary education in England was characterised by growth in creativity practices (Jeffrey and Woods, 2003; Cremin, Barnes and Scoffham, 2009) despite increasing performativity<sup>e</sup> (Ball, 1998). Stemming from NACCCE (1999) which advocated creativity and arts for all, a decade of policies encouraged cross-curriculum creativity, and creative teaching strategies. This inclusive approach reflected change in how researchers conceptualised creativity, from focusing on ‘high creators’ to creativity viewed as ubiquitous, involving collaboration as well as solitary engagement. Recognition of a creativity spectrum from little c (i.e. everyday creativity) to big c (i.e. paradigm-shifting creativity) reflects distinctions between big and little ‘c’ (Craft, 2000, 2001), ‘personal’ and ‘historical’ creativity (Boden, 2004) ‘mini-c’ creativity (intrapersonal meaning-making), ‘little c’ and ‘big c’ (Beghetto and Kaufman 2007).

### ***Creative decade research findings***

Qualitative researchers identified school culture and context as key to the development of creative primary schools; aspects drawn out in Davies *et al*'s (2011) systematic review included:

1. *Physical environment*: flexible use of space and resources, provision of appropriate materials and tools including formless and digital ones, working outdoors and beyond the classroom, e.g. in galleries and museums.
2. *Pedagogical environment*: children offered control and appropriate risk-taking, teachers balancing freedom and structure; using playful/ games-based approaches, enabling children to set their own pace; mutual respect, dialogue and flexibility between staff and pupils; modelling creative attitudes; high expectations; encouraging collaborative work.
3. *Partnerships beyond schools*: involvement with sporting, arts and business communities, attending to mutual learning and long term impact.

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<sup>e</sup> Ball uses this term to delineate (negative) emergent phenomenon of teachers and schools subjected to accountability measures which include children's performance in standardized tests, inspection evidence and other external monitoring of teachers by others who are not teachers. He notes that such measures are altering not just how learning takes place but they redefine what learning is and the construction of learner and teacher identities. Performativity is frequently described in English education as the enemy of creativity.

Meanwhile, Ofsted<sup>f</sup> published evidence of creative teaching and learning in primary schools (Ofsted, 2006a, 2010a), highlighting how creativity and creative partnership raise aspirations and standards. Partnership studies revealed pedagogic characteristics of external parties as distinctive, working alongside children to help them to realise their ideas (Galton, 2008), acting as ‘co-learner’ where ‘shared knowledge is generated’ (Bancroft *et al.*, 2008, p153). These studies highlighted greater focus by teachers on knowledge and discipline, ‘cued elicitation’ (Galton, p. 10), and assessment demands. Discussing differences between artists’ and teachers’ pedagogies, Hall *et al.* (2007) used Bernstein’s (1966) distinction between artists’ ‘competence’ pedagogy (offering children more control) and teachers’ ‘performance’ pedagogies (emphasising outcomes).

In many English primary schools participating in Creative Partnerships<sup>g</sup>, teachers were inspired to reconstruct pedagogy, including students as classroom observers, and dialogue between pupils and staff (Bragg *et al.*, 2009); findings reflected elsewhere (Craft and Chappell, 2009). Pedagogy developed between artists and teachers was seen as a hybrid alternative to ‘default’ pedagogy (Thomson *et al.*, 2012) of the three-part lesson<sup>h</sup>, and emphasis on outcomes and assessments. Thomson *et al.* (2012) highlight features of such creative pedagogy, including transformation of ‘sociality’<sup>i</sup> of classroom context and culture.

### ***Creative pedagogies***

Interest in creative pedagogies increased over the creative decade (QCA, 2005; Galton, 2008). Whilst definitions varied, most encompassed both teacher and learner orientation, exemplified by Dezuanni and Jetnikoff (2011, p. 265) asserting creative pedagogies involve ‘imaginative and innovative arrangement of curricula and teaching strategies in school classrooms’ to develop children’s creativity.

Research revealed how educators experienced tensions, since although there was scope for fostering imagination, lateral thinking and playing with ideas, there was also downward pressure from high stakes assessment which threatened to undermine creative pedagogies. Nevertheless, research exploring teachers and learners’ creativity during this decade highlighted the survival of creative pedagogy characterised by four components: children and their teachers being engaged in innovation, ownership, control and relevance (Jeffrey, 2003; Woods, 2002). Additionally, curiosity, connection making, autonomy and originality were documented as key features in classrooms of highly creative professionals (Grainger, Barnes and Scoffham, 2006), who, it was suggested, fostered play and exploration in open ended contexts (Jeffrey, 2004; Einarsdottir, 2003; Poddiakov, 2011).

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<sup>f</sup> Government inspection agency

<sup>g</sup> A Government-funded initiative in areas of rural and urban deprivation, funding partnerships with creative specialists, to nurture children’s creativity. As part of economic austerity measures the incoming Conservative dominated government in 2010 closed the programme.

<sup>h</sup> A particular government instruction at one stage in the first decade of the twenty-first century

<sup>i</sup> A term used by Thomson *et al.* (2012) to mean “the ways in which people live together and find a place in a community” (p14).

Central too was fostering children's control of learning and ownership of knowledge (Cremin *et al.*, 2006; Cremin *et al.*, 2009; Jeffrey and Woods, 2006). Studies of children's possibility thinking<sup>j</sup> as core to creativity in the early/ primary years, noted that this was enabled by affording time and space and teachers' 'standing back' (Cremin *et al.*, 2006). Craft, McConnon and Matthews (2012) also highlighted how teachers also stepped forward, 'meddling in the middle' (McWilliam, 2008:267) becoming critical collaborators in the application and production of knowledge (Hayes, 2012). Studying 9-11 year olds in science, mathematics, art and geography Craft *et al.*, (2012) highlighted the teacher's role in offering 'possibility broad' opportunities whilst Clack (2011) noted challenges posed by 'possibility narrow' tasks. A recent re-analysis of previously published work demonstrated children's own narratives as central to their creativity (Cremin, Chappell and Craft, 2012).

In contrast to some studies of creative partnership (eg Galton, 2010), which suggest polarisation of teachers' and external partners' pedagogies, findings from the possibility thinking studies of teachers stepping forward to be 'meddlers' in children's creative learning, and the provision by teachers of 'possibility broad' approaches, are not dissimilar to those pedagogies adopted by artists working alongside children highlighted by Thomson *et al* (*ibid*) and others researching creative partnership.

### **Changing direction**

The decade of creativity in English primary schools terminated abruptly. The incoming Conservative government (2010) announced a National Curriculum review which focused on four 'core' areas: English, mathematics, science and physical education. Although the reviews' Expert Panel reported in 2011 (DfE, 2011) the new curriculum implementation deadline was adjusted to September 2014 with an eye to international comparisons (DfE, 2012). Despite England's performance in the most recent waves of assessment by TIMSS<sup>k</sup>, PIRLS<sup>l</sup> and PISA<sup>m</sup> being either average or higher than average in reading, mathematics and science at each age tested, the government emphasised reading, computation and scientific processes as requiring improvement.

In 2012, a narrower proposed curriculum was revealed<sup>o</sup>, reflecting the regressive perspective on children as vulnerable, passive and novices (Craft, 2011), a narrative

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<sup>j</sup> The transformation of 'what is' to 'what might be' through 'what if' and 'as if' thinking, as conceptualised by Craft, 2002 and subsequently the focus of over a decade of empirical studies by Craft, Cremin, Clack, Chappell and others.

<sup>k</sup> Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study initiated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Achievement in 1995 for grades 4 and 8

<sup>l</sup> Progress in International Reading Literacy Study initiated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Achievement in .... In 2001 for grades 4 and 8

<sup>m</sup> Programme for International Student Assessment, initiated by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development for fifteen year olds in 1997.

<sup>n</sup> In 2009 PISA involved 74 countries. Both produce summative data through specially administered tests.

<sup>o</sup> Academies (self-governing, specialist schools, directly funded by government. free of local government control and also often in receipt of corporate funding or support – mainly secondary but some primary) and Free Schools (set up by parents, charities, religious groups businesses and parents in response to local needs but funded by the taxpayer and free to attend) are exempt from the National Curriculum, they do nevertheless have to ensure a balanced and broad curriculum, and are not exempt from testing.

contrasting with the creative decade perspective of children as active, capable and producers and consumers in their own right (Craft, *ibid*).

With only part of the whole curriculum defined by government, potential for significant change opened for primary schools. Creative responses to seismic change in English primary education are not unknown, (Jeffrey and Woods 1998, 2003, 2009), indeed the creative decade can be seen as a third wave of creativity in primary education since the mid-twentieth century (Craft, 2002).

This study sought to document practice during a liminal period in history for English primary schools, through a micro-ethnographic study and to highlight commonalities between two schools with contrasting histories and cultures with respect to creativity.

### **This study: pedagogy for creativity in a liminal period**

This interpretive study researched practice in two primary schools recognised for their commitment to creativity, so as to understand their experiences and practices at a transitional time. They constituted a purposive sample where qualitative data was collected over a number of months. This paper focuses on pedagogy, one of the study's foci<sup>p</sup>: *What characterises pedagogy for creativity in these schools?*

### ***Methodology***

A case study approach was used (Stake 1994), each school a case, reflecting the interpretive paradigm; emerging knowledge actively socially constructed and understood, and uniquely reflecting particularities of lived experiences, thus recognising multiple 'truths' given multiple interpretations of, and perspectives on, events and situations. The researchers sought to understand socially constructed meanings in each school, attending to individual voices and perspectives in so doing. The relatively short period of data collection (five months), reflected intensification in academic life, pressures on funding agencies, and time and resource pressures in schools. The study thus adopted what Jeffrey and Troman (2004) have named a 'selective intermittent time mode': a version of time-pressured ethnography in which selected periods of immersion in the research site enable progressive focusing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) on key issues, maximising limited time.

A participant observer approach was adopted recognising degrees of participation from passive to complete; the researchers strived for balance between insider-outsider positions (Spradley, 1980,) without imposing or intruding. Qualitative data collection methods were used (Table 1). Whilst there was close similarity between sites, depth of context and interpretation varied, as discussed later.

### ***Sample***

The two schools in this purposive sample were 'Ridgeway Primary' and 'Broadhill Primary' (pseudonyms), both in Southern England, each previously known to the researchers. Coyne

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<sup>p</sup> The pedagogy focus explored the teaching whereas the other focus explored the way in which curriculum (i.e. planned learning in the school) was interpreted and organised.

(1997p.624) suggests such sampling is a “practical necessity” in qualitative research allowing researcher(s) to select data sources likely to elicit the richest data set.

*Ridgeway Primary:* A large school with 345 children in an affluent town north of London. Recognised as outstanding by Ofsted (2006b), and 98% of 11 year olds having attained level 4 in both English and mathematics for the previous three years, while children in the school with statemented special educational needs (2%) and those eligible for free school meals (10%), are below the national average. The school has long been committed to creativity, particularly arts-based, and is recognised as offering outstanding music education (Ofsted, 2006b). Ridgeway has well-resourced and actively-supported extracurricular activities and clubs, is lead school for mathematics holding other awards including Eco School, Active Mark award, Healthy Schools and Green Tree.

*Broadhill Primary:* An oversubscribed Church of England Voluntary Controlled school with 215 children in a city in South West England. Over 10% of pupils claim free school meals. The proportion of pupils with statemented special educational needs, is above average. A recent Ofsted report (2010b) recorded outstanding care, guidance and support. Pupils’ achievements are seen to be outstanding and reflected in excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and high attainment. Standards are high in English and maths, over half of pupils exceeding expected levels. The school was a National School of Creativity (2009-2011), holding many awards (Green Flag, Healthy Schools Enhanced, Inclusion Quality Mark, Eco-School, Activemark Gold).

### *Ethics*

The research adhered to British Educational Research Association’s code (2011) addressing informed consent, confidentiality and secure data storage. Following approval from OU ethics committee, written informed consent was acquired from adults parents, teachers and external partners; children’s consent gained verbally. Consent forms were stored securely, computer-based data password protected and anonymised.

The study grappled with ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ issues. The field worker at Broadhill already had a strong working relationship, volunteering as artist, acting as parent governor, and co-ordinating a national research-oriented practitioner network of which the school was founder member. This researcher thus had a multi-faceted insider relationship with the school. A historical lens was thus inherent in data collection and interpretation, yet the field researcher transitioning to outsider researcher whilst maintaining an insider identity with respect to other roles. Ethical sensitivities included possible sense of obligation to participate and abuse of trust, ownership, issues of confidentiality, long-term anonymity and particular insights possible only to those deeply on the inside of the institution (Costley *et al.*, 2010). Being an insider-researcher brought tensions in how distance could be created between the research data, its interpretation and the community that had generated it.

At Ridgeway Primary by contrast, ethics were less complex, the field researcher being an outsider - although one principal investigator had formerly conducted two studies there, and previously been an insider as parent, and after-school club committee member. Since the

field researcher was new to the site, the historical depth and perspective possible in the other site could not be achieved here. However, previous insider knowledge in the team meant a degree of insider insight was brought to bear in analysis.

### *Data collection*

Data was collected in summer and autumn terms, 2011 by one field researcher at each school. Both were guided by the naturalistic phenomenological framework, adopting Jeffrey and Troman's (2004) selective intermittent ethnographic mode (above). Total collecting data was equal in each, and apportioned and framed according to insider- outsider roles. Ridgeway data was collected over six days, three in each of the summer and autumn terms. Broadhill data was collected over twelve weeks, in shorter episodes.

In each, qualitative data was collected from two main sources: classroom / playground observations, and interviews with head teacher, deputy head teachers, governors and teachers whose lessons had been observed. Interviews, which are foregrounded in this analysis due to the differences in researcher knowledge of the contexts, were semi-structured. The researchers sought to explore multiple perspectives with regard to creative teaching and learning. Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed for later analysis. Observational data included field notes, photos of classrooms and classroom activity and documentary evidence, such as planning documents, reports and school-generated DVDs. Up to two days' observation data were collected from each Key Stage<sup>q</sup> at each school, researchers seeking both a situated and more impartial view (Creswell, 2008). A range of data sources (Table 1), enhanced potential trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

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<sup>q</sup> Foundation Stage: 3-5 year olds, Key Stage 1: 5-7 year olds, Key Stage 2: 7-11 year olds



	<b>Ridgeway Primary School</b>	<b>Broadhill Primary School</b>
<b>Observation: fieldnotes</b>	✓ (KS1, KS2)	✓ (KS1, KS2)
<b>Observation: still images</b>	✓ (KS1, KS2)	✓ (KS1, KS2)
<b>Interview: headteacher</b>		✓
<b>Interview: deputy head</b>	✓	✓
<b>Interview: chair of governors</b>		✓ (by email)
<b>Interview: vice chair of governors</b>	✓	
<b>Interview: Governor</b>	✓ (teacher governor, notes only)	✓ (x2, by email)
<b>Interview: teacher</b>	✓ (x3: FS, KS1, KS2)	✓ (x1: FS)
<b>Interview: parent / artist</b>		✓ (x1)
<b>Documentary evidence (school policies, DVDs, reports)</b>	✓	✓

Table 1 Creative Primary Schools: showing what data was collected where

## Data analysis and findings

Analysis was driven by *What characterises pedagogy for creativity at these schools?*

Following whole-team data reading and discussion of first impressions, field researchers undertook detailed analysis, and open coding of the entire data set for their site. Interviews and observations were coded line by line, images and documents regarded as illuminative. Each field researcher undertook axial coding, naming themes that emerged from the initial coding, followed by comparison, pattern analysis and engagement with wider literature. Two levels of analytic blind triangulation were undertaken, by field researchers then principal investigators<sup>†</sup>, increasing trustworthiness and rigour. The analysis sought open ‘windows’ into lived experience in schools recognised for their creativity, where staff and governors were determined to hold on to this dimension of their work in the face of oncoming change.

<sup>†</sup> The two field researchers blind coded a sample of one another’s data mirroring open, axial and thematic coding. The two Principal Investigators in turn blind coded samples of this already-triangulated analysis. Post-coding discussions at each level increased inter-rater reliability.

## *Findings*

Three characteristics emerged across both cases in relation to pedagogy for creativity. These were: firstly, co-construction between and with children frequently involving real-life contexts for learning, secondly, high value placed on children's control/ agency/ ownership, and thirdly teachers' high expectations in children knowing 'how to' engage creatively, in other words valuing children's motivation and capabilities. These were evident in each school's development of creativity through the arts, use of integrated study topics, flexibility in time use, seeking of children's immersive involvement, and attending to children's demonstrations of learning.

### *Characteristic 1: co-construction*

In each school, embracing change enabled compelling experiences. Shared reflection and dialogue was valued; inclusive approaches to co-evolving teaching and learning were embraced. Broadhill had a long history of shared reflection, including dialogue with parents, and explicit acknowledgement of ethos. This was newer but nevertheless important at Ridgeway, where co-construction focused on how teachers worked with children to generate new ways of understanding, doing and engaging.

Shortly before the fieldwork, Ridgeway had piloted with 5-7 year olds their 'Creative Curriculum', foregrounding co-construction. Shifting away from teaching a prescribed curriculum determined in advance, Ridgeway sought a responsive curriculum acknowledging children's interests. One teacher described this as *'sit[ting] down with the children .... right at the beginning [of a topic] and say[ing], "This is our topic, what would you like to find out?"', you know, "what would you like to learn about?" [and] that's fed back into our planning'* (LPS FUteach intv p. 2). Another teacher echoed this, suggesting the creative curriculum gave teachers *'just a bit more freedom in your planning'*, allowing teachers to focus on *'what the children are interested in.'* (LPS KS1teach intv p. 5.) She gave the example of many children interested in, say, sport, *'you need to use that in your numeracy or your science or whatever'* (LPS KS1teach intv p. 5).

During this pilot, pedagogy became more learner-sensitive, children *'given ... the chance to have an input into what they want to do'* (LPS DHintv p. 5), teachers incorporating co-construction, which fieldwork revealed occurred not only in planning, but with more immediacy. One teacher suggested, *'There are lots of books being [spontaneously] made, would you like to make books later in the week ... Maybe we could have a book-making table tomorrow'*. (LPS FU fnotes p. 2). Day-to-day pedagogy was thus framed by a child-sensitive curriculum as a dynamic internal framework rather than an externally obligatory one, enabling those involved to make it personally relevant. The pilot was considered successful by children and staff, and the creative curriculum implemented school-wide.

At Broadhill, too, the research revealed ownership of creative teaching and learning valuing children's ideas and interests and balancing child-and adult-initiated learning. Over several years, teachers had introduced co-construction, children co-designing a creative curriculum. Teachers followed children's interests and lines of enquiry, remaining open to

possibilities, planning changes in response to new questions, hypotheses or ideas. Children were listened to, their ideas valued, seeking balance between child-initiated and teacher-led activities. The deputy head highlighted a shift in practice with classroom ‘learning walls’ displaying integration of children's ideas into their learning journeys (SPS DHintv p. 3). Educators were seen as ‘companions’ alongside children (Bancroft, 2008), the co-designed curriculum allowing more freedom, agency and choice. As the head teacher stated: *‘Including children’s starting points and ideas and planning has worked really well ... we’ve been looking at ... how to encourage children to offer their ideas... have those included in what and how they learn’* (SPS HTeach intv p. 2).

An important feature of co-construction in each school was emphasis on real life contexts and relevance. Particularly evident at Broadhill, teachers developed creative environments for learning, capitalising on children’s curiosity and desire to meaning-make. Staff shared the view that high achievement and attainment comes from children’s engagement in learning and developing skills and passion for lifelong learning. Most teaching was cross-curricular and based on the premise that teaching and learning is more meaningful and memorable if linked to real life experience. The head emphasised: *‘The central aims ... are to value all children individually and to appreciate and enjoy every child.’* (SPS HTeach intv p. 1). These included ongoing motivations or threads that staff had seen children revisit regularly, or themes emerging from children’s work/play. Each topic was enriched with at least one ‘Inspire Day’, often via external visits or visitors. During their ‘Space’ topic, children climbed into a mobile planetarium, worked with an astronomy lecturer from Oxford University and enjoyed a session with an ‘Eagle Space’ roboteer. The head (as above) commented, *‘There is a creative and exciting buzz in the school and the daily opportunities to learn beyond the classroom have really mushroomed.’* (SPS HTeach intv p. 3).

Discussions between children and adults were valued. A recent project with 5x5x5=creativity<sup>5</sup> and a long-standing artist partner had drawn in older pupils’ ideas for her forthcoming exhibition on imagination. Children discussed ideas about their own imagination. One child remarked that she would *‘let my imagination run wild in my head ... I can turn ordinary things into magical things’*. Another commented that *‘The ladder represents your imagination. Imagination can take you from one place to another.’* The artist invited children to explore their own ideas in natural and found materials, resulting in a school exhibition (SPS Fnotes p. 4).

Choosing a provocation reflecting children’s interests, to inspire, lead or follow a thread in the children’s learning was key to the most successful child-initiated sessions. As the chair of governors put it, *‘Learning has become more democratic with various inputs from a range of teachers, parents and others. As a result, the “class teacher” is not seen nor sees her/himself as the only or central knowledge source’* (SPS ChGov intv p. 2). Teachers’ creative interventions, ‘Inspire’ days and enrichment activities involved parents and the local

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<sup>5</sup> An arts-based charity based in the South West of England involving groups of artists, educators and cultural centres working in collaboration with children and young people.

community. There were numerous partnerships with external agencies ( e.g. arts organisations and cultural centres) involving children, staff and parents and outdoor learning featured large. The school prospectus declares, *'We are busy developing ... [a neighbouring strip of land], into an outdoor classroom which will include many stimulating and exciting elements to support our curriculum and also teach children about our local environment'* (SPS Prospectus 2012, p. 4). A Forest School project involved artists working with Year 6 children in designing and performing their own plays in the Greek Theatre tradition.

Real life contexts were important at Ridgeway also, but as 'illustrative' rather than the place or source of learning. A governor explained how, following a half-term's topic on the Tudors, Year 4 children were tasked with selling Tudor costumes on eBay. They were to use persuasive and descriptive writing to generate appealing sales adverts and used in a real-life situation, which might occur in their everyday lives.

Whilst both sites valued real-life contexts then, the extent to which these enabled co-construction between adults and children varied. For Broadhill, the real-life context generated was integral with co-construction; at Ridgeway by contrast, real-life contexts provided opportunities to apply and develop learning rather than being intrinsically linked to co-construction.

#### *Characteristic 2: children's control / agency / ownership*

Each school emphasised providing a trusting, agentic environment encouraging children's decision making, offering them ownership and control over their learning. This characteristic was uniquely manifest in each school. For Ridgeway, developing children's control, agency and ownership was an outcome of teachers exercising the same. At Broadhill, this was inherent in the school's inclusive approach involving respectful, dynamic relationships between children and between adults and children which encompassed parental involvement and dialogue.

At Ridgeway, the creative curriculum re-positioned teachers. Described by one teacher as *'freedom in their planning to implement what you're interested in and also what the children are interested in'* (LPS KS1teach intv p. 5) this generated a strong sense of curriculum ownership among teachers. As discussed earlier, the school's pilot and subsequent implementation afforded children greater control over learning. Teachers all talked of 'engagement' with learning for children in this process of planning, and learning not *'being... imposed upon [the children]'* (LPS DHteach intv p. 7) rather, they were actively involved.

Teachers felt the (then) newly-implemented 'creative curriculum' enabled greater sensitivity to children's needs and interests. Pedagogy now included *'[looking] at different topics to teach the children to try and capture their imagination and their interest and make them relevant to what they've done'* (LPS DHteach intv p. 4), drawing on children's previous interests, experiences and knowledge which encouraged their feedback and/or input. As for characteristic 1 (co-construction), this was seen across age groups, the youngest children influencing teachers' planning often on a more immediate or daily basis whilst older

children's impact on topics was longer term. Greater ownership for children was emphasised. For example in an observed upper KS 2 lesson, following independent work about various explorers, children were described by the teacher as 'experts', emphasising their ownership of specific knowledge which they would subsequently teach their classmates.

Particularly noticeable in conversation with children at Ridgeway was use of the phrase '*we get to...*' when discussing school activities (in this case, using an outdoor classroom space), implying change in positioning. This closely reflected the deputy headteacher's perspective, that as a result of the creative curriculum, '*they [the children] are suggesting, 'we'd like to...' do this or this*' (LPS DHteach intv p. 1) more regularly and her view that openness to children's ideas offered a better context for learning; the aim of the creative curriculum being to '*deliver the key skills... through a topic of our choice or the children's suggestions.*' (LPS DHteach intv p. 2). Responsiveness she felt generated greater dynamic in learning and teaching: '*we've thought critically about what we currently do and whether it meets the needs of the children*' (LPS DHteach intv p. 5).

Daily homework also sought integration of children's interests with classwork. The deputy headteacher explained teachers were '*trying to encourage the children to think outside of the box and take things off at tangents if they want to, certainly for their own personal learning outside school*' (LPS DHteach intv p. 6) and '*to encourage them to suggest topics that they might like to explore*' (LPS DHteach intv p. 1). Children's control, agency and ownership were encouraged through children taking responsibility and control through being actively involved in their learning within and beyond school.

At Broadhill, development of children's ideas and ownership was facilitated by strong trust and inclusion. Parents were in close dialogue with teachers, and the school sought to develop dynamic, respectful relationships. Learner agency signalled value and rigour. As the deputy headteacher observed, '*children take great pride in their own work and learning and enjoy the way ... their ideas become part of ... classroom practice. They are becoming increasing confident in making suggestions and sharing their views...*' (SPS DHteach intv p. 3).

The regular 'enrichment days' held each term exemplified high value placed on children's control, agency and ownership as children engaged in activities to challenge and focus on one key skill, learning beyond the classroom and extending capabilities. The head teacher reflected, '*A recent event focused on 'Improving your own learning' and looked for ways in which the adults also modelled and talked about their learning when faced with a new activity. Plenaries and evaluations ... [suggested] ... all children felt they had more awareness of their learning styles and needs as well as thoroughly enjoying the day*' (SPS Hteach intv p. 4).

Children's control, agency and ownership were also fostered through creative and reflective practice supporting and enabling their ideas. Children were involved in developing spaces, documentation, displays, fostering confidence and self-expression in creativity. For example, in Broadhill, a six year old boy working with an artist school as part of the

development of a school exhibition, to generate his own personal starting point for researching, drawing, transforming these to much larger scale, subsequently modelling. Notable was his capacity to explain his ideas to the artist and then to others. Key skills were matched to the planned area of learning. Staff were explicit in learning terminology used; this in turn impacted upon their understanding of attitudes and dispositions being foregrounded. ‘Learning walls’ discussed above, detail children’s questions in topic design as well as ideas elicited as their learning journey progressed. *‘It’s not just asking what they’ve done; it’s how they’ve got there, why they went there. That’s been incredibly powerful because sometimes you can really see links in the children’s learning, you can see the connections they’ve made from one area to another in one session alone’* (LPS DHteach intv p. 4).

### *Characteristic 3: high expectations in skills of creative engagement*

In each school, teachers held high expectations in relation to development of children’s skills – in learning *how to engage creatively*. In this characteristic the schools manifested contrasting approaches; a pervasive, ‘bottom-up’, school devised approach at Broadhill; a more ‘policy-driven’ prescribed skills focused approach at Ridgeway. In each school, teachers held high expectations of children’s creative engagement.

Broadhill’s curriculum was underpinned by key skills. The headteacher reflected: *‘[our] provision ... [is] about developing the whole person, developing life skills and developing lifelong fascination for learning and curiosity’* (LPS Hteach intv p. 1) affirming a belief that engaged children will achieve and attain highly if they are developing essential skills and passion for lifelong learning. The majority of teaching was cross-curricular and assumed real-life contexts to stimulate meaningful and memorable learning.

Staff and governors shared the belief that in a fast changing world, children need excellent life-wide skills as articulated by the Chair of Governors: *‘Today’s younger generation face a demanding future and creative thinking will be key to their ability to live peacefully and sustainably in the future. For this reason we need to put creativity at the heart of our learning from the very start’* (LPS ChGov intv p. 1).

The school foregrounded creative learning skills as forming the heart of creative pedagogy so that in enabling learning to learn, both cognitive and affective skills were integrated into learning experience design. Key skills were: Enquiry, Problem solving, Creative thinking, Information processing, Reasoning, Evaluation, Self-awareness, Managing feelings, Motivation, Empathy, Social skills, and Communication. Through staff meetings and in-service training staff regularly reflected on development of these, infused by teachers’ high expectations.

The headteacher emphasised achievement and creativity for each individual, recognising the need to track progress: *‘We ... work ... hard to make sure that underpinning everything for the children here as well as an amazing provision and a nurture of their individuality in terms of excitement and taking risks there are really clear review and assessment processes in place, so we can check every child is making progress, every child is being checked and the parents are part of that process ...’* She also reinforced, *‘it’s really*

*important that people don't think that standards and creativity or having fun being outside are somehow mutually exclusive'* (SPS Hteach intv p. 5). In this school, high standards expected by staff were strengthened through immersion in personal and professional learning and development, shared reflection and thinking. Staff had recently partnered with a local school to co-develop practice.

Whilst teachers work in what the head referred to '*a culture that makes it feel possible*' (SPS Hteach intv p. 4), the deputy head emphasised children's increased capabilities, positing they '*take great pride in their own work and learning and enjoy the way that their ideas become part of the classroom practice. They are becoming increasingly confident in making suggestions and sharing their views.... (they ) are increasingly confident to take risks and are developing good social skills, working cooperatively in teams*' (SPS DHteach intv p. 3). For a recent Enrichment Day, Year 6 children were invited to plan and lead workshops with adults in a supporting role. The children worked in groups to identify a skill that they wanted to support others in developing: sessions included animation, making friendship bracelets, designing clay monsters and football skills (SPS fnotes p. 3).

By contrast, Ridgeway staff's high expectations in children's capabilities foregrounded doing well in assessments, particularly national tests at age 11. Teachers all referred to parental-expectations of high results in these and the need to emphasise counterbalancing skills. The creative curriculum had shifted the school from an emphasis on content knowledge, to '*move back to a point where we look at the National Curriculum in terms of skills rather than the QCA units that were imposed*' (LPS DHteach intv p. 1), however teachers were still influenced by assessment outcomes and thus felt tied to directives of the National Curriculum in order to achieve the outstanding outcomes expected by parents. A governor reinforced the emphasis on skills indicating '*the creative curriculum is... still looking at the children's core skills, you're just doing it in such a way that you're being creative at how you're delivering it*' (LPS DHGov intv p. 3). The focus at Ridgeway Primary may be described as 'received skills', taken on board from external guidance. These were 'embedded skills', that is to say those rooted in specific disciplinary contexts such as music, writing or maths. These received and embedded skills contrasted with Broadhill where 'home grown' skills were evolving in response to children's needs.

Nevertheless, both classroom observation and informal discussion at Ridgeway suggested children felt that they had had a developing input into what was to be taught and greater openness over time to children's ideas offering a better context for learning. For the deputy headteacher, the aim of the creative curriculum was to teach key skills '*through a topic of ... [informed by] the children's suggestions.*' (LPS DHteach intv p. 2) .

## **Discussion**

Of the pedagogic characteristics shared by these schools, some are particularly worthy of comment. In relation to the wider ethos which contextualised pedagogic practices, each school viewed children as both capable and vulnerable, reflecting contemporary views of childhood as polarised: at one extreme seeing children as empowered and at the other as

endangered (Craft, 2011). The two schools encouraged children's agency in generating new ideas whilst separating what school can offer from what is beyond it. Arguably symbolic of this were high fences surrounding the considerably spacious grounds at each site demarcating safe space - yet within each site was reflected a view of children as highly capable. Additionally the narrative of children as capable was evident; everyday creativity was prioritised. Although variously represented in research literature the schools share in common the belief *all* children are creative.

Pedagogy for everyday creativity was integrated with the arts in these schools, valuing arts as inherently motivational. Their approaches were resonant with Eisner (2002) who highlights special and motivational role of the arts in a more flexible purposing of education through curiosity allowing for the unexpected, together with arts' capacity for refining perception. Each school recognised creativity as inherent beyond the arts, yet arts played an important role in each school's collective identity.

Although analysis did not specifically focus on it, these schools were nurturing possibility thinking through creative pedagogy (Cremin *et al.*, 2006). Each encouraged children's self-determination, intentionality and development of ideas. At Broadhill, there was particularly strong evidence of imagination, play and immersion. The schools varied in degree of possibility offered. Earlier studies note broader degrees of possibility enable more open creative outcomes (Chappell *et al.* 2008; Craft *et al.* 2012). At Ridgeway, degrees of possibility were more determined by staff and external expectations than in Broadhill, where teachers and artists invited children's possibility questions which guided learning journeys. Despite differences however in each there was evidence of teachers standing back, giving children time and space, and profiling learner agency, resonating with findings in respect of pedagogy that nurtures possibility thinking (Cremin *et al.*, 2006). In both sites teachers to a degree negotiate understanding / meaning, 'meddling in the middle' as children develop their creative ideas (Craft *et al.*, 2012).

Significantly, each school regarded the physical environment as closely related to the pedagogical environment, reflecting two themes identified by Davies *et al.* (2011). Each values flexible and appropriate use of space affording children some control over content and pace of learning and on nurturing dialogue, flexibility and playful exploration alongside high expectations. The third theme identified by Davies *et al.* (ibid), partnerships beyond schools was especially evident at Broadhill Primary, with particular reference to arts partnerships building long-term relationships. Each school sought to enable children's control and ownership, reflecting two of four characteristics of creative learning and teaching (Jeffrey and Woods, 2003) although there were differences: Ridgeway focused more on teachers' control and ownership and through this, children's engagement; Broadhill oriented more holistically toward ownership and control for children and staff.

Co-participative, co-constructive approaches in both schools were resonant with 'creative learning conversations' (Chappell and Craft, 2011), which use differences as a starting point for transformational change. The analysis revealed that whilst historical



engagement of Broadhill with these co-participative and co-constructive approaches was longer standing than at Ridgeway Primary, both valued these.

In addition to these areas of resonance with one another and with other research studies, each school's creative practice was uniquely articulated. Broadhill's involvement with creative partnership and artists' provocations is resonant with findings by Thomson *et al.* (2012) who document their use and value as open ended stimuli. Use of flattened hierarchy as discussed by Chappell and Craft (2011) is strong at Broadhill: pupils, teachers, parents and artists regarding themselves as learners. Ridgeway meantime is more attuned to the wider narrative of raising standards of attainment, yet maintains a strong balance between creativity and performativity, emphasising overtly the latter. Overall - these characteristics of creative pedagogy are summarised in Fig 1.

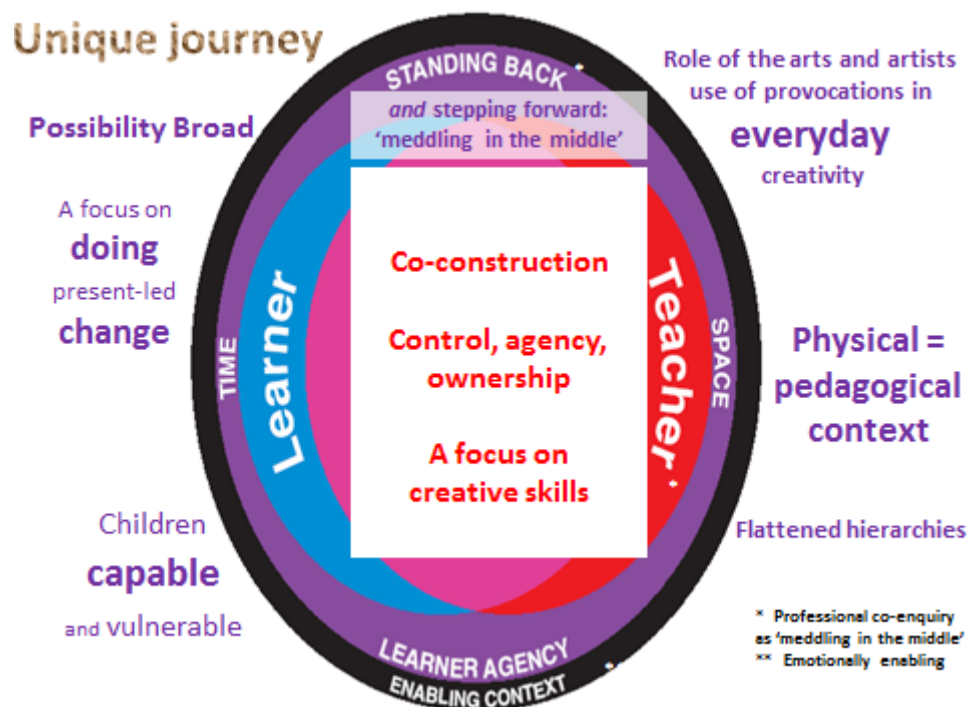


Fig 1: Characteristics of creative pedagogy in this study (developed from Cremin, Craft and Burnard, 2006 and Craft, McConnon and Matthews, 2012)

The schools are at different points in their journeys. Ridgeway, with long standing commitment to creativity and the arts yet less experienced than Broadhill in seeking student engagement and voice and encouraging greater staff flexibility with the creative curriculum. Yet they share characteristics of creative pedagogy.

## Conclusion

The characteristics of creative pedagogy revealed echo research undertaken by others as discussed. What this study adds is to capture some fine-grained differences between two cases, as each seeks to develop its own unique approach to fostering creativity. The schools,

whose practices were documented during a key period in the history of curriculum change in primary education, face opportunities. Whilst the Government fine-tunes its new National Curriculum, focused on narrower core knowledge and moving away from valuing creativity, these schools are at liberty to develop practices in ways they see fit. It remains to be seen where, with their current deep commitment to nurturing creativity, they will move once the new policies are fully understood.

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## **Appendix: Conversation schedule, Creative Primary Schools**

### ***Governors***

We have chosen to learn about XXXX because of its work in developing creative teaching and learning – how would you as a governor characterise/epitomise this work?

What do you see as your role as governor?

Are you involved in other schools?

To what extent is it important is it for XXXX to maintain creative teaching and learning approaches while implementing government policies such as the National Curriculum and continuous assessment and target setting (what contradictions are involved)?

What kind of support do the governors give to creative teaching and learning?

What do you see as ‘creative teaching and learning’?

What do you see as benefits of creative teaching and learning? [see teacher question]

Which government and LA policies do you think should be amended or discarded to ensure XXXX is able to develop its creative teaching and learning polices?

To what extent do you think XXXX has the balance right with regards to assessment and performance imperatives and creative teaching and learning? Would you want to change that balance; if so, in what ways? Can you give any examples of ways in which you think the school manages the balance between these two policies?

Could these be addressed in any other ways? Have you seen this done in any other schools?

### ***Teachers***

We have chosen to learn about XXXX because of its work in developing creative teaching and learning – how would you as a teacher characterise/epitomise this work?

Please give a brief summary of your professional career and the importance you place on creative teaching and learning policies if at all.

Can you give us some examples of what you see as creative teaching and learning from your practice or from school policies?

What benefits do you think creative teaching and learning generates (long/short term)?

How can assessment/creative teaching and learning issues be addressed?

How do you personally balance individual assessments, meeting learning targets and creative teaching and learning? Do you think this is possible in all schools?

Can you give us any examples of how or when you have integrated these two aspects? And why – what was the particular benefit in that situation?

In what ways do you think school policies help maintain creative teaching and learning practices? Do you think these can be worked for other schools?

### ***Headteachers and Senior Leadership***

We have chosen to learn about XXXX because of its work in developing creative teaching and learning – how would you as a senior leader characterise/epitomise this work?

How do you interpret ‘creative teaching and learning’?

Can you give us a brief outline of your professional career and the importance you place on creative teaching and learning policies?

How difficult has it been to maintain creative teaching and learning policies in the face of government priorities, Ofsted inspections and assessment and testing priorities? What have been the key difficulties?

What strategies have you adopted to overcome these difficulties? What might you have done differently?

What advice would you give others wishing to develop creative teaching and learning approaches? How might they address potential difficulties? How might they learn from your experiences?

Who are the key people upon whom you rely to maintain creative teaching and learning?

Can you give us some examples of school policies and projects that feature creative teaching and learning, particularly any that include the “basic” subjects? i.e. mathematics, literacy.

What constraints and opportunities for creative teaching and learning do you anticipate in the light of what we know about the new curriculum and priorities due in 2012? How might these be addressed?