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**Creativity or Conformity? Building Cultures of Creativity in Higher Education**

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**Learners Reconceptualising Education:  
Widening Participation through Creative Engagement?**

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**Abstract**

This paper argues that engaging imaginatively with ways in which statutory and further education is provided and expanding the repertoire of possible transitions into higher education, is necessary for providers both in higher education and in the contexts and phases which precede study at this level. Fostering dispositions for creativity in dynamic engagement with educational technology together with the consideration of pedagogy, learning objects, inclusion, policy and the management of change, requires innovative provision to span the spaces between school, home, work and higher education learning. Reporting on The Aspire Pilot, a NESTA-funded initiative at The Open University, the paper offers the beginning of a theoretical frame for considering learning, learners and learning systems in the information age prioritizing learner agency. It will report emergent empirical findings from this inter-disciplinary project, with a significant e-dimension, which seeks to foster the creativity of 13-19 year olds in considering future learning systems, developing provocations for others to explore creative but grounded possibilities. It explores implications arising from this project for approaches that may facilitate widening participation in higher education.

**Keywords:** Schome; vision; learner voice; learner agency

## **Learners Reconceptualising Education: Widening Participation through Creative Engagement?**

### ***Introduction - the wider context***

The project reported in this paper starts from the assumption that shifting trends in statutory and further / higher education, require dynamic engagement with technology, inclusion and management of change, and demand that learning provision spans spaces between home, school, work, and higher education (Craft, 2005, Twining et al, 2006). The project team recognise the rising role for and focus on, learner agency.

Trilling and Hood (2001) identified that the Knowledge Age started at the point when spending on Industrial Age capital good, such as engines and industrial equipment of all kinds, was exceeded by spending on information and communications technology. They identified that this occurred in 1991 in the USA. This change shifted “the balance of what is valued in our work and in our society” (Trilling and Hood 2001 p.8) and in so doing also altered the priorities that our education systems should have, given one of their key roles is to prepare people for living and working within society. One of the manifestations of this change is the growing call for lifelong learning (e.g Hargreaves 2004; Wells and Claxton 2002), which raises questions about the nature, role and relationships between schools, colleges, universities, workplaces, and other sites of learning.

The DfES eStrategy (2005) highlighted the importance of ICT in enabling the education system to be transformed to meet the needs of society (and individuals) in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Central to this strategy was the notion of personalisation and the ability for learners to be supported across physical contexts, including across different educational organisations, the workplace and home. This support was seen as being not only anywhere but also anytime, or indeed ‘just in time’. A major study of the implementation of two of the priorities of the DfES eStrategy (as it was in 2005) concluded that “the key to successful implementation of the e-strategy involves effective management of educational change, which is primarily about people rather than the technology” (Twining et al 2006 p.6).

That same study (Twining et al 2006) found strong support for the view that the curriculum within schools and colleges should change to focus on ‘skills’ such as communication, learning to learn, critical thinking, and problem solving, alongside ICT, Information handling, Literacy and Numeracy. These fit well with the lifelong learning agenda, but also with developments in ‘learning theory’, particularly those associated with social constructivist theorists who are building on the work of Vygotsky and Bruner’s work in particular highlights the importance of learner agency (eg Bruner 1996) which one might expect to link closely with notions of personalisation.

A vast amount of resource is being devoted to the transformation of education across all levels. For example, in the school sector within England the government is investing billions of pounds in a programme called Building Schools for the Future, which aims to replace Industrial Age schools with Knowledge Age alternatives. Similarly, within the HE sector in the UK

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organisations such as JISC are investing heavily in extending the impact of ICT on learning. However, there is a danger inherent within these approaches, which is that if one starts from existing structures when developing visions of future education systems then one is likely to end up with sub-optimal results, which are overly prescribed and constrained by those existing structures. Indeed, even when asking people to imagine future education systems starting from a 'clean sheet' Sheehy & Bucknall (2006) found that the visions that emerged were 'like school only a bit better'. They concluded that people are so constrained by their experiences in and pre-conceptions of existing education systems, which evolved to meet the needs of the Industrial Age, that they are unable to conceive of systems more suited to the needs and affordances of the Knowledge Age. In order to address this issue the notion of schome (not school – not home – schome – the education system for the Information Age) was conceived in 2004. The Aspire Pilot, a NESTA funded project, started working with young people in March 2006, exploring ways of supporting them in thinking about visions for schome. This paper provides a brief overview of The Aspire Pilot, before exploring some of its findings and their implications for approaches that may facilitate widening participation in higher education.

### ***Aspire Pilot background - learners re-conceptualising education***

The Aspire Pilot is a development and research project, which is funded by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, that runs from March 2006 until January 2007. The Aspire Pilot seeks to offer young people opportunities to take a leadership role in developing provocations to support their own thinking, that of their peers and others, in considering future learning systems, or schome; not school, not home, schome – the education system for the information age (Twining, 2003). Schome refers to lifelong and lifewide learning which occurs neither at school, nor at home, but refers to an evolving education system for the learning age. Schome, whilst being one integrated system, is likely to involve multiple approaches and sub-systems, within it. The Aspire Pilot reflects a growing movement here in the United Kingdom as well as in North America and Australasia, by policy makers, to offer young people a voice in their learning offer by sharing their experience of schooling (Fielding, in press).

The Aspire Pilot specifically involves three inter-related strands:

1. working with young people (aged 13 to 18) to develop 'provocations' to support others in thinking in a creative yet grounded way about what schome should be like (i.e. in developing visions of schome), where 'provocations' might be activities/techniques/approaches that support vision building;
2. developing the schome community - a group of people, with a shared interest in the future of education, who are working together to envision and then instigate schome;
3. developing the technical infrastructure to support collaboration within the schome community.

Strands 2 and 3 are intended to support and extend the work within Strand 1, which forms the crux of the project. Within Strand 1 The Aspire Pilot team have worked with two groups of students (and their teachers):

- high achieving pupils from StBoniface's College, which is a boys Catholic school in Plymouth;
- children in 'the bottom GCSE set' in Woodlands School, which is a comprehensive in Basildon.

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For both groups of students the project spanned a period of roughly five months, from March 2006 to July 2006. An extended workshop was run by The Aspire Pilot core team at each site at the beginning of the process, in order to stimulate the participants, give them an overview of what the project's aims and objectives were, and to provide a model for how the students would operate during the project. The students were then supported in working on initially developing their own visions for schome and then creating 'provocations' to help others think in a creative yet grounded way about schome. This support included workshop time within school managed by teachers, as well as inputs from external consultants with expertise in working creatively with young people (for example, impossibility thinking, role play, science communication, musical composition). The core project team liaised with teachers and consultants during this time, which included participating in some of the workshops. Each of the schools shared the provocations they were developing with the other school and were given feedback to help them refine and enhance them. In July there was a 'celebration event' at each school during which the students provided the core team with information about their provocations and the process that they had gone through in developing them. Throughout and beyond this part of the project, some of the students became drawn into the schome community website (<http://www.schome.ac.uk/>), which was designed to support, log and extend their engagement.

Alongside the development process we adopted ongoing enquiry lines (or 'Throughlines' – a concept developed at Harvard University's Project Zero), supporting our overall research question: 'How can young people be supported in provoking visions of schome that are creative and grounded?' In this paper we present a 'slice' through our ongoing data analysis in terms of principles for aspiring which emerge from the data. To this extent what we report here is analysis in progress.

### ***The Aspire Pilot's theoretical stance and research methodology***

The Aspire Pilot seeks to transform learning systems placing the learner in a central position in relation to driving educational change as well as benefiting from it. In Fielding's terms – and drawing on MacMurray (1993) we seek to transform the 'functional' to the 'personal' (Fielding, in press); a direction also adopted by Bork (in press)<sup>1</sup>. Fielding describes the currently dominant model of schooling as a 'high performance' one, where students are valued predominantly in terms of the extent that their own attainments contribute to the school's organisational performance. The pressure under which both pupils and teachers seek to improve performance and raise standards, he suggests, in fact undermines the purpose, aspirations and justification of the school. The Aspire Pilot seeks to foster a person-centred mode of engagement in considering the possible future of learning systems, or 'schome'.

Our aspirations for this pilot project – and for the full Aspire project for which it is laying the foundations, represent the 'person-centred' type offered by Fielding in a four-fold typology of what he calls the interpersonal orientation of organisations, as shown in Figure 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Bork (in review) proposes 'global, rich, lifelong learning' as a new paradigm for learning, as complex, highly adaptive systems co-constructed to meet the needs of all students (even exploring how all learning could be undertaken in the learner's native language), and, utilising with intelligence information and communications technology.

*Figure 1 The Interpersonal Orientation of Organisations*

Schools as <b>Impersonal</b> Organisations	Schools as <b>Affective</b> Communities	Schools as <b>High Performance</b> Learning Organisations	Schools as <b>Person-Centred</b> Learning Communities
<i>The Functional Marginalises the Personal</i>	<i>The Personal Marginalises the Functional</i>	<i>The Personal is used for the Sake of the Functional</i>	<i>The Functional is used for the Sake of the Personal</i>
<i>Organisational Type Mechanistic Organisation</i>	<i>Organisational Type Affective Community</i>	<i>Organisational Type Learning Organisation</i>	<i>Organisational Type Learning Community</i>
<i>Characteristic Mode Efficient</i>	<i>Characteristic Mode Restorative</i>	<i>Characteristic Mode Effective</i>	<i>Characteristic Mode Morally and Instrumentally Successful</i>
<i>Student Voice Restricted formal consultation making current arrangements more efficient</i>	<i>Student Voice Ambient listening fostering closer understanding of those involved</i>	<i>Student Voice Wide-ranging formal + informal consultation to make current arrangements even more effective</i>	<i>Student Voice Wide-ranging formal + informal engagement to enhance the development of wise persons</i>

In fostering ways of thinking about schome, new technologies are seen as playing a role both in the way the project is manifested and in what young people are likely to generate. However, the project seeks to address the absence of overall educational vision which has often accompanied the development of new technologies in education (Twining et al, 2006).

The project also seeks to develop theory about educational systems, through the close engagement in the evolution of young people's ideas, by the core project team. In doing so the project seeks to build on and expand the Educational Programme Typology developed by Rix and Twining (in press), who identify nine different types of systematic educational programmes (or approaches), where educational purposes are primary, and where the programme is designed to nurture the learner's long term learning trajectory, as summarized in Figure 2.

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*Figure 2 The Educational Programme Typology (Rix & Twining in press)*

Type	Programme Title	Programme length	Dominant educational approach	Degree of learner choice	Opportunities to access setting	Age range	Regulation	Location
Type 1	Alternative	Long or short term	Creative	High	Multiple	Up to 18	Systemic	Fixed sites
Type 2	Last chance	Short term	Discipline	Low	Multiple	Up to 18	Systemic	Fixed sites
Type 3	Remedial	Short term	Therapy	Low	Multiple	Lifelong	Systemic	Fixed sites
Type 4	Special	Long term	Therapy	Low	Multiple	Up to 18	Systemic	Fixed sites
Type 5	Home	Long or short term	Creative	High	Multiple	Up to 18	Informal	Diverse sites
Type 6	Selective	Long term	Traditional	Low	Single	Up to 18	Systemic	Fixed sites
Type 7	Comprehensive	Long term	Traditional	Low	Multiple	Up to 18	Systemic	Fixed sites
Type 8	Schome	Long or short term	Creative	High	Multiple	Lifelong	Systemic	Diverse sites
Type 9	Adult	Long or short term	Traditional	High	Multiple	Post 18	Systemic	Fixed sites

Put simply, then, the overall approach and philosophy of The Aspire Pilot involves both generating and theorising visions of future education systems which address a broad range of capabilities in a grounded and creative way. It seeks to put young people's ideas at the heart of these processes.

The way of working that the students were supported in adopting, was intended to reflect the underlying philosophical stance of the project team and to provide evidence about the effectiveness of this approach.

The research methodology is informed by a number of strands.

Firstly, our approach is influenced by a broadly interpretivist frame, i.e. seeking to understand rather than to explain – a school of research which is drawn from Idealism and underpinned by the notion that to understand is to know through the mind, and that we cannot know the 'true' nature of the object world, separate from our perception of it. Such an interpretivist frame is situated in a socio-cultural approach to learning as discussed earlier, where significant factors in learning are seen to be the cultural setting, activities in which participants engage, and discourse among them (for example, Vygotsky, 1978).

Secondly, the approach taken is phenomenological, i.e. the study of situated activity, where inquiry focuses on "encountering", and where we recognize the role of description in universal, a priori, or "eidetic" terms as prior to explanation by means of causes, purposes, or grounds. We recognize the situatedness of activity within The Aspire Pilot, in terms of space, time and the body, as well as social interaction, the meanings attributed to the task, learner and teacher stance, and so on (Craft et al, 2006, Craft et al in review).

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Ultimately the project seeks to go beyond the simple reporting (as an ethnomethodologist might) of accounts, to re-describing these initially tied to the language and practices observed, and then in relation to existing theoretical accounts, *leading to the generation of theory* in relation to our over-arching research question and our subsidiary Throughlines.

In practice this involved collecting contextualised data as part of the on-going process of engagement by the students and members of the project team (including teachers within the schools and consultants who worked with the students). This was supplemented by evaluation reports, sampling of the work the students produced, and semi-structured interviews with the teachers.

The data set, then, included the provocations produced by the participants, also audio, video and photographic material collected whilst the young people were developing their provocations, evidence from young people collected during development sessions led by the core ASPIRE Pilot research team, together with transcripts of interviews undertaken by the research team with both young people and their teachers, written reports and reflections provided by creative provocateurs working with the young people, and written and post-it based reflections generated at various points by the core ASPIRE Pilot research team.

Primary data analysis was carried out by one member of the core team. This was then triangulated with the views of the two other core team members and revised in the light of that process. From this analysis a number of principles were identified that appeared to underpin effective engagement in the learning process by students.

This paper provides a summary of key findings in relation to the principles for aspiring which emerge from the data. We categorised our findings in terms of ‘principles’ and ‘pragmatics’ of working creatively with young people, which we believe have direct relevance to the HE sector

### **Findings**

The articulation of these ‘principles’ and ‘pragmatics’ predominantly grew out of the core team’s analysis of both what had worked and what had not worked about The Aspire Pilot process. The ‘principles’ and ‘pragmatics’ which emerged most strongly from the data analysis are described below; we found, too, that an overlapping category emerged, that of ‘principled pragmatics’

### **Principles**

At the most abstracted conceptual level were the principles being applied by all of those involved in the process. We found evidence of principles which could be classified as related to pedagogy, as well as those concerned with the underlying pedagogical approach.

**Pedagogy:** Those related to *pedagogy* particularly focused on *the facilitator’s ability to strike a balance between directing and scaffolding abstract thinking*. One of the project team commented on the importance of “creating a structure to think out of” whilst one of the external consultants, a self-confessed ‘impossibility thinker’, was aware that she was requiring the students to “develop ideas in a more winding or roaming way with less of a constraint to move from A to B”.



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***Underlying pedagogical approach:*** Also vitally important to the learning process was the ***underlying pedagogical approach to integrating internal and external staff and students***. The Aspire Pilot team found that in responding to the needs of the teachers and students in the two sites, they had in fact given considerable thought to the balance and mix of roles of internal school staff, external creative thinkers and the team themselves and how the students interacted with each of these people. In particular, attention had been paid to how different professionals might assist students at different points in the process. One of the school teachers recognised the importance of getting “as many [school] staff involved as possible as a way of modelling” and also went on to acknowledge the importance of using “outside specialists who have a non-school hat”. He discussed how working with school staff, students had “got to the point where they were thinking is this right?” and how a visit from a member of The Aspire Pilot core team critiquing their endeavours “gave that confidence boost that they were doing the right thing...and gave them more information”.

Working across all ASPIRE pilot activity was ***the notion of having fun and enjoying yourself as a fuel to the process***; this was commented on by many of the adult facilitators and was evidenced in the young people’s text message feedback: “!safe man!” “N it is wicked” “I had lots of ideas and I found it really fun”.

A further pedagogic principle was that of ***paying heed to the locus of attention when envisioning and creating provocations***. The analysis of data demonstrated that it was important to encourage participants to think about the personal and themselves as the starting point for their visions. This principle can be seen highlighted in a positive comment from the Plymouth students to the Basildon students regarding the Basildon students’ draft provocations: “we like it when provocations involve questions, particularly questions that made the provocation very personal and made you think about yourself”. It also transpired that ***bringing the relationships between teachers and learners alive as part of teaching/learning*** was intrinsic to The Aspire Pilot learning process, and that for some students this was unusual. The ‘impossibility thinker’ external consultant commented upon the “importance of teacher and learner having relationships, and how important it is for students to be able to see themselves as able to have relationships in this way. For some of them this perception of themselves seems almost non-existent”.

### Principled Pragmatics

There were a number of ways in which the over-arching principles were turned into more pragmatic approaches, categorised at present into the three areas of approaches to ideas, the learning process and view of the young person’s role.

***Approaches to ideas:*** ***Ideas were approached in such a way that there was no hierarchy***; this was especially key in terms of pushing for creative ideas – when asked about ASPIRE Pilot do’s and don’ts, one of the teachers commented: “do allow all suggestions, however ‘way out’”. It was also vital, if a little daunting, for teachers in particular to have the ***courage to provoke young people to genuinely critique their educational experiences***. A colleague of The Aspire Pilot team noted how “their teachers have the courage to invite them to think critically and imaginatively about their own educational experience”. Fundamental to carrying this out in a way which allowed students to continue to engage with the current system was a ***careful management of what might be expected from The Aspire Pilot, always being clear that the system would not change overnight as a result of their thinking***.

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**The learning process:** The learning process itself was approached in such a way that *it was always acknowledged that ‘aspiring’ was difficult for students and adults alike*; one of the teachers recommended recognising “how hard it is”. Related to this, although not touched upon by many of those involved, a group of the Plymouth students had also recognised that “*conflict causes provocation*”; having the courage to exploit this certainly also seemed pertinent to The Aspire Pilot team in terms of further envisioning challenging interpretations of scheme. The final ingredient in terms of approaching the learning process was *the importance of being sure to start from where the participants were in their current system*. This emerged from comments from The Aspire Pilot team and a teacher respectively: “don’t underestimate how ensconced we all are in our current system” and “get them to think about their own goals and what they’d need to learn first – to move away from traditional school and subjects”.

**View of the young person’s role:** The final element of the principled pragmatics was the view taken of the young person’s role. As detailed above this project was fundamentally about giving voice to young people’s idea for re-envisioning our current education system. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that it was felt by many of those involved that *valuing students’ contributions was core to the process*. Going even further than this, it became increasingly apparent to many of the adult facilitators (and to some of the students too) that not only should students’ contributions be valued, but that having been through The Aspire Pilot process, and engaged in both visioning and the development of provocations, a number of the students now had the potential to be ‘living provocations’ in future Aspire undertakings. A Plymouth teacher commented: “it could be with you guys [The Aspire Pilot team] start...and then they [the students] go to another school and do the same sort of workshop you did and that would start another school”.

### Pragmatics

At the most ‘hands-on’ level were the pragmatics of what did and did not work when ‘aspiring’. These we grouped in to three categories: practical ways in or starting points for the aspire process, triggers and tips for carrying out the process itself and finally pragmatics of seeing this through to vision or provocation outcomes.

**Practical ways in or starting points:** In order to start The Aspire Pilot process, the students in particular highlighted *the importance of using open questions*. The Basildon students fed back to the Plymouth students as follows: “good if there had been more questions for us to answer and for the questions to need more than yes/no answers”. *Multiple examples of visions were also vital to kick-start the visioning process in others*; again the students recognised this in their feedback to each other. Coupled with these factors *was the facilitators’ role of acknowledging participants’ perspectives, and then working with these using a variety of methods and modes of working* (e. g. role play, sculpture, photography, podcasting, craft) to trigger their imagination. *Grouping students in unusual ability and age ranges* was also encouraged and helped to challenge prior conceptions about possibilities. One of the teachers also felt that it would be useful to include HE: “involve more than one phase – (e.g. primary, secondary, HE)”.

**Triggers and tips for the process of aspiring:** When engaging in The Aspire Pilot process, *varied communication techniques* were identified as fruitful. This included working face-to-face and developing understanding of how web-based tools such as an online forum, and

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a wiki could appropriately be used at different points in The Aspire Pilot process; it became clear that different tools were needed for different purposes (the schome community 2006).

Another aspect of successful pragmatics of process which it appears cannot be underestimated is ***ensuring that visioning focuses on the learning that will occur in the education system of the future*** as well as the environment. One of The Aspire Pilot Team noted early on in the process that “most of them get stuck on the physical space...its what happens in the buildings that counts more”.

Other pragmatics of process focused on particularly practical aspects of ‘aspiring’ such as the ***benefits of working off-site*** to aid “thinking out of the box”, and ***making sure teachers’ time was appropriately resourced***. ***Time for students*** was also fundamental and if not allowed for, led to problems. One of the external consultants noted that when time was cut short on one occasion it led to students “not having time to adjust to shifts in their thinking between sessions”. ***The practicalities of resourcing*** were also emphasised - see above list of modes in which participants worked (an interesting example of this was when an external consultant used to working in primary settings where craft materials are readily available, sent a craft focused task to a secondary school without these resources available, whose budgets had been spent and who could therefore not complete the task) – as well as the importance of explaining complex language.

***Pragmatics of seeing the process through to outcomes:*** Finally, the pragmatics of the outcomes emerged from analysis as important. This included firstly ***making sure students could translate sometimes complex ideas into actual visions***; on occasion they struggled with modes and resources which were unfamiliar to them which stilted the translation process. Secondly, it was important to ***capitalise on the dissemination possibilities*** inherent within The Aspire Pilot process. One of the teachers articulated this as follows: “Try to find as many different mechanisms for disseminating your thinking practice and ideas as you can, firstly within school, then to external partners and community”. One of the teachers suggested that the students should run sessions for teachers in a nearby teacher training college on how to teach creatively.

The principles and pragmatics reflect, unsurprisingly, perspectives on learning held by The Aspire Pilot team:

Firstly, we saw evidence of a general valuing of the view held by the core team, of ***a social constructivist perspective on learning***, informed by the work of Bruner (1966, 1996), Vygotsky, (1962, 1978) Bruner, Vygotsky and others, where learners’ capabilities are seen as personal and social meaning-making, where learning journeys are differentiated, and pedagogy involves both ‘scaffolding’ and modelling. The project assumed a socio-cultural view, in which significant factors in learning are:

- cultural setting
- activities in which participants engage
- discourse among them

Secondly, and informed by a view of learning as situated and socially constructed, ***the project sought to encourage co-participative, dialogic and co-constructive activity***, through the building, sharing and evaluating of provocations (Wegerif, Seidel). The provocation is designed to initiate and support dialogic debate between peers and others in dyadic and more complex

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interaction, both face to face and online. From the outset, young people were invited to engage in a co-participative exploration of provocations, initially those provided by the core team, and, later, those provided by peers in their own and the other core school site. The provocation is a dialogic device, being both an activity and a medium to support dialogue.

Our intention was that young people would be able to engage in face to face engagement with others in their own group, remote engagement via the core project team and the teachers in the project, with students in the other group, and online exploration of visions and provocations, within the schome community website, which includes the wiki used by The Aspire Pilot (although in practice there has been less ASPIRE Pilot activity in the website than we had hoped for). In each instance, the engagement we seek to encourage is dialogic – involving both the recognition of others’ perspectives, hearing and responding to these in discussion rather than purely putting out one’s own point of view.

The material within the schome community website in particular provides a focus for individual and collaborative meaning-making. It assumes that, as Barthes (1975, 1987) would argue, the meaning of a work resides not in the work itself, but in its viewers. The wiki, as a space where each reader/viewer can make a written or other contribution, facilitates a form of *intertextual engagement*; a term coined by Kristeva (1986) who, influenced by the work of Bakhtin (Emerson, 2000), identifies the three vertices of dialogue as involving the writing subject, the reader, and exterior texts, suggesting that ‘each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read . . . any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. (p. 37)’. The wiki, then, offers a mosaic of multiple textual connections between a potentially vast number of contributors/participants, making visible – through dialogue - the intertextuality which Kristeva writes of. Through the wiki, young people and others can be engaged in a continual refinement and deferment of meaning both between and through texts. In The Aspire Pilot, the texts involved go beyond words, and involve multi-modal engagement, so that the inter-textual engagement young people and others are involved in, may involve other media (for example, drama, film, music, model-making), often involving several people working together closely and intensively. Through shared and collaborative ‘performances of understanding’, a continuous refinement, deferment and propulsion of meaning is undertaken. It provides a space where participants may develop ‘possible selves’; a theory developed by Marcus and Nurius (1986) explaining a connection between present self, motivation, behaviour and possible future self at the levels of both collective and individual identity.

Learners, then, in The Aspire Pilot, are seen as competent, constructing unique meaning whilst engaged with others. The project seeks to enable participants to engage with others in ways which are personally meaningful, and yet it faces the challenge of doing so in the context of a school system which may, for some, hold little meaning or relevance. It holds then, at its heart, a tension between MacMurray’s (1993) ‘functional’ and ‘personal’ relations, in seeking to facilitate agentive identity formation and the establishment of personal engagement in the context of what for some is a non-engaging environment (i.e. the one of school).

Gratifyingly, one of the key messages emerging from research strand of the Pilot was that students were indeed highly motivated by and engaged in their work on the project, which appeared to be largely due to the use of the strategies discussed above. In the case of the ‘lower

achieving' students this was noted as being particularly unusual and the teachers commented on the increase in the quality of the work that the students produced, as a result.

### **Implications?**

In The Aspire Pilot our focus has been on school age learners and on activities specifically directed to developing visions of schome. However, our findings may nevertheless offer implications for widening participation in both further and higher education, in relation to creative engagement in particular. The principles and pragmatics discussed above, then, may influence and have implications for, conceptualisations of learning, pedagogy, and other practices and approaches in higher education. They may also have implications for how we approach creativity in higher education.

**Implications for learning and pedagogy:** the project highlights the *adult's role as co-participative* in facilitating the learning group (Project Zero, 2001, 2003), and as inclusive (Jeffrey and Craft, 2004). *It has assumed that teaching involves adopting multiple entry points* which means that a variety of approaches to learning are valued (Gardner, 1983, 1991, 1993). Overall, the role of the teacher is seen to be one which involves the *provision of an inclusive learning context*, in which co-participative engagement is valued, where access to learning is highly valued and multiple ways in are prioritised, and where documentation is seen as critical, as a shared diagnostic tool for planning learning.

**Implications for views of creativity:** At the heart of this project is *an assumption that 'possibility thinking' is both at the heart of creativity and as desirable within education*. In this view, advanced by Craft, Burnard and Cremin (Craft, 2002, Burnard et al 2006, Cremin et al 2006), possibility involves a move from recognition – i.e. 'what is this?' to exploration – i.e. 'what can I do with this?', a conceptual distinction explored and validated through empirical work in primary classrooms (Jeffrey, 2004, 2005, Jeffrey and Craft, 2004). The project also manifested a view of *learning as engaging creative capabilities – a view of creativity as 'agency acting on structure'* – Gale (2006, in review), drawing on Hegel, Marx, Taylor, Weber, Heidegger, Husserl, argues that the person is seen to be doing something outside of the customarily accepted ways of doing things – agency (personal self-determination) acting on structure (convention), which in turn is seen as framing behaviour. The ASPIRE Project itself is a 'ripple' programme, seeking to step outside customary practices in either being educated or thinking about how education comes about, and it seeks, ultimately, to frame (i.e. identify and develop) new practices in learning systems. Agency plays a key role in this. The project seeks to move from a position where agency is seen as relative to structure (where individuals exercise will and choice and are identified through their responses to structure) to one where agency actually determines structure. And finally the project holds embedded within it a consensual view of assessment (Amabile, 1983, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1996, 1997), which recognises *that the attribution of originality in creative endeavour is always conveyed through some form of consensus among appropriate observers*; in this case the participants – adults and young people, consider the extent to which provocations generate visions of schome which are considered to be original (and also grounded), giving and receiving feedback on their provocations, engaging in debate and discussion around their success.

Summing up, the project team would suggest from the evidence so far analysed that the process of aspiring itself may be a salient and necessary one to engage in with students at higher education level as well as those involved in schools, if creativity and possibility in higher education is truly to be fostered.

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