CREATIVITY IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

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Juliet Desailly

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Juliet Desailly has worked in Education for over thirty years. Having trained originally as a specialist drama teacher and then working in Theatre-in-Education, when she became a primary teacher she brought a range of different teaching and learning methods to her work.

Juliet worked in Inner London primary schools for over twenty years, refining and adapting the primary curriculum to suit the children she taught – integrating social and emotional skills within the curriculum, emphasising the children's identity and culture and raising self-esteem by providing an inclusive curriculum for all learners.

As well as her teaching and work in Theatre-in-Education Juliet has been a Humanities adviser and a deputy head teacher. After seven years as a lecturer at the Institute of Education on the Primary PGCE course, she now works as a consultant in creativity and curriculum planning.

Juliet has written a large amount of educational material, including two series of *Infant History* for BBC Radio and materials for the Education Department's Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) resource. She has recently published her first children's book, *Ma'at's Feather*, a story set in Ancient Egypt and a set of accompanying cross-curricular lesson ideas.

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

What do we want a classroom in a primary school in the second decade of the 21st century to look like? Children sat in rows looking at the board? Children involved in investigations and experimentation? Children working silently and alone? Children debating enthusiastically in groups? Or perhaps all of these things at different times? And what do we mean by a 'classroom'? Could the learning be happening outside, in the community or a natural environment?

As teachers, we need to help prepare young people for life in a rapidly changing society where they can be innovative, responsive and fulfilled. We will need the ability to use methods of teaching and learning within a curriculum that will make that possible.

Many schools have already been adapting what and how they teach and how the learning is organised to make it more holistic, more engaging, more personalised and more creative. The next few years will see a new National Curriculum being embedded in England with consequent opportunities and challenges for teachers to provide the best and most appropriate learning opportunities for the children they teach. The White Paper on education, announcing the new curriculum, stated it 'creates scope for teachers to inspire'. It envisaged 'teachers taking greater control over what is taught in schools, innovating in how they teach and developing new approaches to learning' (DfE 2010: 40). While much in the aims of the new National Curriculum emphasises 'a core of essential knowledge' it also recognises the importance of giving teachers 'the freedom to use their professionalism and expertise in order to

help all children realise their potential' (DfE 2011: 1). In criticising the previous National Curriculum for 'squeezing out room for innovation, creativity, deep learning and intellectual exploration' (DfE 2010: 40) it implicitly supports these aspects. This could be the time for teachers to take the opportunity to develop and practise teaching methods that inspire young people and allow for deeper learning.

To find a balance between all the constituent parts of both the National Curriculum and the broader curriculum, to find teaching methods that inspire and motivate young people to learn deeply and well will be a challenge for teachers joining the profession, as it will be to more experienced teachers. They will need to be flexible and to learn new skills in the way they plan and teach but it will also give the opportunity for teaching and learning that are exciting and fulfilling for children and teachers alike.

Defining creativity

Creativity has always proved hard to define, both in education and in its wider contexts. However, it has also been something that has been thought valuable and worth promoting. The first aim of the 1999 National Curriculum (known as Curriculum 2000) states, 'the curriculum should enable pupils to think creatively and critically, to solve problems and to make a difference for the better. It should give them the opportunity to become creative, innovative, enterprising and capable of leadership to equip them for their future lives as workers and citizens' (DfEE/QCA 1999). During the first decade of the 21st century there were several developments designed to foster and promote creativity, including a joint-department review called *Nurturing Creativity in Young People* (DCMS/DfES 2006) and the report and teachers' resources *Creativity: Find it, Promote it* (QCA 2005).

Teachers have long been aware of the importance to children's learning of the spark of creativity in children's descriptions and art work: 'It's like a rainbow was caught and shining in his eye.' They see how children invent methods for problem solving or find patterns in data or images. They relish the enthusiasm and intense concentration children show when involved in exploring materials or mixing ingredients but these moments of classroom magic have often seemed at odds with the drive to raise standards. The research and understanding of the benefits of creativity and creative learning are still often sidelined or ignored.

In the final report of the Cambridge Primary Review, which was published in 2010, the director of the review, Professor Robin Alexander, commented that in submissions to the review 'the words "creative" and "creativity" appeared . . . more frequently than almost any others'. He continued that the words 'invariably were regarded positively. The words were also used somewhat loosely' (Alexander 2010: 226). This 'loose' terminology sees the term 'creativity' used to describe arts subject areas, cross-curricular planning, working without

preconceived outcomes, creative teaching, children's creativity . . . and this list is not exclusive.

Mathilda Marie Joubert agrees that 'creativity is a very elusive concept to define, and even when defined, it is interpreted in a variety of different ways' (2001: 29) and argues that we do not have a shared language for creativity. Despite these difficulties, creativity returns again and again in both what schools and teachers want to provide for their pupils and what industry and successive governments want in the workforce.

Defining terms in education today is a matter of some significance; as a new National Curriculum is under review, what is meant by domains and subjects, knowledge and understanding, skills and concepts, to name but a few, takes on considerable importance. The politicisation of education has led to the polarisation of viewpoints and various 'camps' have emerged. In the discourse, creativity has often been equated with progressivism or even 'sloppiness'.

However, educational theorists in recent years, working alongside psychologists and neuroscientists, have actually defined quite clearly where creativity sits within education and it is far from its connotations as lacking rigour or 'anything goes'. Joubert states: 'We have to reclaim the meaning of the word "creativity". Creativity should be rigorous, it is grounded in knowledge and skills and there should be a balance between freedom and control in all creative activities' (2001: 30). This is not to say that scholarly debates do not continue, but, even if we are still not decided as to whether creativity is an 'intelligence' or a 'state of mind' (Lucas 2001: 40), we are able to categorise creativity in education into its three distinct parts – teaching creatively, learning creatively and teaching to develop creativity – and to recognise the key elements, strengths and benefits of these three approaches and how to acquire and develop the knowledge and skills to use them appropriately in the classroom.

Effective teaching and learning

There is a strong argument (see Jeffrey and Craft 2001) that creative teaching is actually 'effective teaching'. Amongst the 'noticeable characteristics' of outstanding student teachers in the Ofsted criteria published in 2008 are:

- 'take risks when trying to make teaching interesting, are able to deal with the unexpected'
- 'show innovative and creative thinking'
- 'have the ability to reflect critically and rigorously on their own practice to inform their professional development, and to take and evaluate appropriate actions'.

As will be seen from the subsequent chapters in this book, these are key elements of creativity themselves. Becoming a teacher who is able to teach

creatively and to encourage pupils to learn creatively and to develop their own creativity is also to become a highly effective teacher.

Anna Craft also argues that 'in a constructivist frame, learning and creativity are close, if not identical' (Craft 2005: 61) and that teaching for creativity is 'learner empowerment'. The 2010 Ofsted report 'Learning: Creative Approaches That Raise Standards' (Ofsted 2010) focused on schools that used creative approaches to teaching and learning and their effectiveness in raising standards of education. They were clear that effective creative teaching and learning were rigorous and well organised: 'Careful planning had ensured that the prescribed curriculum content for each subject was covered within a broad and flexible framework and key skills were developed. These examples were accompanied by better than average achievement and standards or a marked upward trend' (Ofsted 2010: 5). Ofsted reported that for 'schools in this survey with a wide ability range, a focus on creative learning was driven by the need to break down barriers to learning and improve achievement. In all cases, the survey found that this was effective' (2010: 15).

Benefits of creativity

Teaching creatively and to develop creativity brings many benefits to both the teacher and the learner. The creative teacher will challenge, engage and motivate their pupils, placing learning within contexts that have relevance for the children that they teach. The creative learner will be developing intellectual and academic skills that will last a lifetime. Being creative involves both generating new ideas and synthesising a variety of other peoples' ideas into a new understanding. It involves reflection and evaluation as part of the process so that a creative learner is constantly asking themselves questions as to the best way to proceed. Creativity involves finding patterns, researching, hypothesising and generalising. As well as being investigative and enquiring, a creative person will be reaching conclusions and be able to argue 'I think this because . . .'

Much is made at the present time of comparing our educational 'performance' with that of other countries. It is interesting that in countries hailed for their superior achievements, factors include being able 'to generalise and creatively use information based on their own investigations and modelling of complex problem situations' (OECD, quoted in a speech by Michael Gove, January 2011) and 'increasing the emphasis on deep understanding, the ability to apply knowledge to solving new problems and the ability to think creatively' (OECD 2011). Creativity provides exactly this.

A creative learner will also be developing social and emotional skills. The need for persistence, determination and an understanding of delayed gratification is necessary for creative approaches and teachers will need to help children to develop these skills as they foster and enhance other skills necessary to working creatively. Although creativity can be a solitary way of working it is

often at its most effective when working with others. Learning to work well in a group situation, listening, debating, working in a community of enquiry and being able to disagree, agree and move others' ideas forward in a constructive way are all integral skills to working creatively.

Creativity can also involve expressing personally held views and opinions or sharing ideas in expressive media. As such, it involves a measure of self confidence and the ability to be a risk taker.

About this book

Aims

Creativity in the Primary Classroom is designed to be of use and interest both to trainee teachers and to qualified teachers at any stage in their careers who want to understand better what creativity in the primary classroom looks like, its value and how it can be achieved.

The book's intention is to be accessible and full of practical ideas to use in the classroom, based on and referencing key texts and research by experts in the area. It encourages a flexible approach to suit the very different needs of teachers with various experience and styles of teaching in a variety of different schools.

The text aims to reflect what creativity in a primary classroom can look like and the activities that teachers and children might be engaged in. As such, it includes examples and descriptions from classroom practice, ideas to use straight away and some longer case studies to show the theories in practical situations. Visualising what one would actually see and hear and do in the classroom situation can be extremely difficult. Hopefully, this book will demystify the subject and make practical solutions readily available.

Rather than being organised on a subject-by-subject basis this book examines creativity as a generic entity and as such demonstrates how the key elements of creativity can be applied to any and every subject and across the curriculum as a whole.

Organisation and structure

The book is organised into four sections. The first, **What is Creativity?**, has two chapters. In Chapter 1, The key elements of creativity, the definition of creativity and the three different types of creativity in education are outlined and discussed. The potential benefits and drawbacks of a more creative approach in the classroom are considered for both teachers and their pupils. In Chapter 2, Creativity in Education: History and theoretical background, the changing place of creativity in the primary school curriculum over the past decades is outlined and the reader is introduced to the work of some of the key

researchers and theorists in the area. The place of creativity in primary schools at the present time is examined in this context.

Part Two, entitled, **A Creative Child in a Creative Classroom**, unpicks the skills children will need to develop in order to work creatively and the techniques teachers can use to develop those skills. In Chapter 3, Building the skills to work creatively, learning and thinking skills crucial to working creatively are considered, including learning stamina, trial and improvement, generating ideas, group-work and communities of enquiry. Chapter 4, Establishing the ethos, considers how a creative classroom ethos is established, looks at the influence of classroom layout and organisation and examines the importance of relationships, motivation and autonomy to learning creatively and learning to be creative. Supporting and scaffolding creative learning is also considered.

The skills and attributes a teacher will need, both to teach creatively and to encourage the development of creativity in their pupils, are the subject of Part Three, **A Creative Teacher**. In Chapter 5, What makes a creative teacher?, the key knowledge, skills and interactions that a teacher needs to teach effectively, both creatively and to foster creativity, are examined. These include the teacher modelling creative working processes personally and being able to identify, foster and encourage creativity in others. Chapter 6, Key skills for the creative teacher, looks in more depth at particular skills that are useful to the creative teacher, including facilitating, questioning, using a sketchbook/scrapbook approach, motivating and using drama techniques. It includes issues such as knowing when to follow the children's interests and when to 'stick to the plan', the importance of good subject knowledge and being able to manage time and make time for extended pieces of work.

Part Four, **A Creative Curriculum**, examines in two chapters how to plan for creative outcomes and how to plan in cross-curricular ways, including how to plan with parallel learning objectives, knowing when to make links and when to teach subjects discretely. Chapter 7, Planning for creative outcomes, looks in particular at using key elements of creativity in planning individual lessons. It shows how creative elements can be added to a more standard lesson and highlights additional considerations from research. Chapter 8, Medium term planning for creative outcomes, extends this to medium term planning. It looks at how a teacher can assess what creative learning is happening and includes a checklist of questions to inform the planning process. The final chapter in this part, Chapter 9, Case studies: Creativity in practice, examines a range of different case studies analysing the creative techniques used. These include six- and seven-year-olds going on a quest, maths in a shoe shop and a year-long exploration of culture and identity.

A final section of the book, Conclusion and Forward Planning, will briefly round up the main points and offer activities to reflect, set goals and forward plan to achieve them.

Additional features

Alongside the text there are ideas for the reader to reflect on, examples of classroom practice and activities for use either individually or in groups. These activities are designed to be used either as self-study or in workshop or INSET sessions and are aimed at Honours (H) level.

At the end of each chapter there is a summary of the chapter content and a section for further study outlined below. Full lists of references can be found at the end of the book.

Concluding each chapter is a section for further study. This section aims to offer the reader who wants to explore the subject in greater depth the opportunity to do so. It is aimed at Masters (M) level and will provide a progressive and cumulative exercise in critical reflection. The activities will be based on the content of each chapter throughout the book.

Making a start

∿ Personal thought and reflection

An Internet search for quotations on or definitions of creativity will produce scores of results. They can themselves be a stimulus for creative thought, making connections or challenging your preconceptions. Try a search yourself and see what you find. Do the quotes connect with your ideas about education in any way? How do they make you feel? Which excite you and which do you want to argue with?

After reading this book, return to this activity and see if you think differently about the quotes. Do any of them connect with theories you have read about? Do they provide a challenge to you to change your practice or reaffirm changes you are already making?

Here are some to start with:

'I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of the old ones.'   *John Cage*

'Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.'
William Butler Yeats

'You cannot use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.'
Maya Angelou

'Imagination is more important than knowledge.'   *Albert Einstein*

'Some look at things that are, and ask why. I dream of things that never were and ask why not?'   *George Bernard Shaw*