



**Teaching for Creativity**

**4-5 March 2020**

**A Comino Consultation at St George's House, Windsor Castle**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/so-now-lets-create>

## Comino consultations

The Comino Foundation is an educational charity committed to exploring:

“better ways of developing young people’s capabilities, their capacity and desire to make things happen – their zest and appetite to learn, to create, to change things for the better, for themselves and others. It encourages and supports innovative ventures designed to enable people to function effectively and to thrive.” <http://www.cominofoundation.org.uk/>

As part of that search for “better ways”, the Foundation regularly hosts 24-hour consultations at St George’s House, Windsor.

These consultations reflect the mission of St George’s House: they aim to bring together groups of people who are seeking to answer:

“a justly perceived need for considered discussion of topics of moment.” <http://www.stgeorghouse.org/>

### Background to this consultation

This ‘considered discussion’ was prompted by the publication in October 2019 of the report of the Durham Commission on Creativity and Education<sup>2</sup>, by the debate which followed it and by the subsequent publication of the Arts Council’s new 10-year strategy: *Let’s Create*<sup>3</sup>. Our group contained a mix of teachers in primary and secondary schools, researchers and representatives of educational charities. (This report ends with a list of the participants.)

We focused on our theme of ‘teaching for creativity’ specifically in relation to schools in England, recognising that the governments in each nation of the United Kingdom currently adopt different policy perspectives in relation to teaching and learning in schools.

### Our starting points

We began this consultation committed to the vision outlined in *Let’s Create*:

“By 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish.”

Dimitri Comino, engineer, entrepreneur and manufacturer, founded the Comino Foundation almost 50 years ago, having built his company, Dexion, into a multi-national business. As well as being an expert in his own field of engineering, he was convinced that most of us are capable of learning the art and the craft of what he called “getting results and solving problems,” and that a key part of this involves developing, through persistent questioning and exploring of alternatives, a fresh understanding of possible outcomes and of the means of bringing them into being.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dur.ac.uk/creativitycommission/-key>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/so-now-lets-create>

## Knowledge and creativity – the “not only, but also” point of view

The Statutory Guidance on the National Curriculum in England<sup>4</sup> states that:

“The school curriculum comprises all learning and other experiences that each school plans for its pupils.”

It goes on to specify that:

“The national curriculum forms one part of the school curriculum.”

- namely the part which:

“provides pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said, and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.”

All our participants were happy to acknowledge that helping children to acquire “essential knowledge” is vital as “one part” of the school curriculum. They accepted the argument that the possession of “essential knowledge” contributes to social justice, in that it is a necessary element of all young people’s early equipment for adult life and helps them to build the potential for playing a “powerful”<sup>5</sup> role in society. We also agreed that it is desirable for children to develop the “cultural literacy”<sup>6</sup> that should, hopefully, grow from a curriculum designed to “engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.”

At the same time, we recognised that individual judgements about what knowledge is “essential” and what is:

“the best that has been thought and said”<sup>7</sup>

will always differ and will certainly shift with time – as anyone who has read Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* will attest. His verdict on what passed for “culture” in Victorian times was that it:

“is valued out of sheer vanity and ignorance, or else as an engine of social and class distinction, separating its holder, like a badge or title, from other people who have not got it.”

This then was not a gathering of people clinging to:

“The romantic notion that teachers need not focus on knowledge and instead turn their attention to developing creativity or communication skills” – *a notion which has, as the School Standards Minister reported, “gripped many countries around the world.”*<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, neither were any of our participants of the Gradgrind persuasion:

“Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4>

<sup>5</sup> Michael Young, David Lambert, Carolyn Roberts, David Roberts: *Knowledge and the Future School*

<sup>6</sup> E.D. Hirsch: *Cultural Literacy: What every American Needs to Know* published Vintage 1987

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Arnold *Culture and Anarchy* - published 1869

<sup>8</sup> Nick Gibb, School Standards Minister, speaking at the launch, in October 2017, of *The Question of Knowledge* <https://parentsandteachers.org.uk/resources/the-question-of-knowledge/>

wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them.”<sup>9</sup>

Though we were committed to the idea that our schools should provide all children with “knowledge-rich” learning, we were not of the “nothing but” tendency. For us it was a case of “not only, but also”. For instance, not only “knowing that,” but also “knowing how.” We felt that if children are to thrive as learners they need to be given the experience, whilst still at school, of putting their growing knowledge to use in ways which involve them personally, which help them see the relevance of that knowledge to their own lived experience and encourage them to engage in “possibility thinking”<sup>10</sup> linked to practical learning experiences. Putting knowledge to use helps us make it our own. We agreed with the Durham Commission that:

“There need be no conflict between knowledge and creativity in our education system. Indeed, the opposite is the case – creativity is founded on deep understanding. Every meaningful creative breakthrough in human history has been made by people with deep expertise, immersing themselves in the practices and problems of the field and finding new ways to see, act or behave.”<sup>11</sup>

We also recognised that it is possible to find schools in England where ‘teaching for creativity’ is flourishing, but we shared the Commission’s regret that:

“more often than not, we are failing to show young people how their hard-won knowledge can be creatively applied to help them lead more fulfilling lives and influence our changing world for the better.”

Like the Durham Commission we observed that we live in a world where the quickening pace of change:

“requires an evolution in how we think, and how we think about education and the way children learn. Our current, knowledge-based system only goes part of the way towards equipping young people with the skills that will give them the confidence and resilience to shape their own path through life. They need to make the most of our human capacity for imagination and critical judgment, especially with our ever-greater dependency on technology and artificial intelligence. They need to exercise creativity.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Dickens *Hard Times* 1854

<sup>10</sup> Cremin, Teresa; Burnard, Pamela and Craft, Anna (2006). Pedagogy and Possibility Thinking in the Early Years. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 1(2) pp. 108–119  
<https://www.dur.ac.uk/creativitycommission/report/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dur.ac.uk/creativitycommission/report/>

<sup>12</sup> Foreword to <https://www.dur.ac.uk/creativitycommission/report/>

**Let's aim to CREATE an England**  
**“in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish.”<sup>13</sup>**

So, the Windsor group applauds the vision, optimism and energy of *Let's Create*. We are cheered by the Durham Commission's report. We like the idea of 'Creativity Collaboratives,' but these are perilous times.

It seems to us that to build the changes which these two documents pre-figure there is an urgent need to establish a nationwide network in support of its recommendations. We think that, especially post COVID-19, it will be vital to build a shared understanding of the broader purposes of schools and to resist the false polarities which have dogged the education debate in England or too long. We long for a policy environment in education which promotes collaboration across political divides, between schools of all kinds and across all the regions of England.

We suggest that, in working to bring about these changes, it would be most helpful to CREATE a wider learning network, open to, and accessible by, all teachers in all schools across all regions of England. This network will need to draw extensively on the newly-enhanced virtual-learning capabilities of schools and reach out to their local communities. Such a network could:

**C-apture** good practice – Identify “empowered schools” where parents and communities are working together with a wider vision of education; build collaborative courage - highlight what can be achieved; collect evidence of impact; demonstrate models of working; identify allies and draw them into a collaborative network

**R-esearch** –nurture a research culture in schools; support research by teachers and children; invite researchers into schools for research internships

**E-nthuse, evangelise, engage** children, parents, employers, politicians; spread the advocacy for what we are doing – show that it is rooted in schools of all kinds and in many different places: give a voice to teachers and headteachers; bring children, teachers and parents together to co-create for their communities, ask children to lead the sessions

**A-dvocate** for the rights of all children to experience their own capacity to create

**T-inker** – play with these ideas, try things out, explore: build professional expertise - identify creativity champions – invite “adults other than teachers” to work with teachers and children

**E-xpand** the vision of what schools can achieve for the children they serve.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/so-now-lets-create>

## What do we actually mean by ‘Teaching for Creativity’?

So, ‘*Teaching for creativity*’ was our theme. As always, the words matter. We recognised that in the phrase “teaching for creativity” the preposition is crucial. We were not discussing “teaching creativity”, or “teaching *through* creativity”, or “teaching *about* creativity” or “teaching creatively”, but “teaching *for*”. We wanted that “*for*” to convey a meaning along the lines of: “in such a way as to nurture.” The Durham Commission report uses the phrase “teaching for creativity” and helpfully provides this gloss:

“explicitly using pedagogies and practices that cultivate creativity in young people.”

So far, so good, but we knew any argument for “teaching for creativity” has to free that word “creativity” from all its baggage, collected over centuries. This age-old baggage tends to consign creativity to the genius, the self-indulgent or the mad. We recognised that, to make progress with our theme, to make a convincing case that “teaching for creativity” is not just a “romantic notion”, we needed help.

In his Foreword to the Durham Commission Report, Sir Nick Serota offers the Arts Council England definition of creativity:

“The capacity to imagine, conceive, express, or make something that was not there before.”

The report acknowledges that:

“Creativity, of course, goes by many names. It may be called intuition, enquiry, or expression; for business, it may be described as innovation, invention or entrepreneurship. In all areas of life, from the sciences and humanities to the arts, creativity is seen as the ability to think laterally and come up with imaginative solutions to problems, to work across disciplines or to enjoy constructive play.”

Prof Paul Sowden, Professor of Psychology, Cognition and Creativity at the University of Winchester, helped us by outlining developments in the research into the concept of creativity. Arguing that creativity is a vital “natural resource,” J. P. Guilford’s 1950 presidential address to the American Psychological Association is often seen as the starting point of increased research interest in the concept of creativity. He and urged researchers to recognise and respond to the need for scientific studies of the phenomenon. In particular, he challenged researchers to focus on the discovery and cultivation of creativity in schoolchildren, emphasising the relationship between creativity and learning.

The definition now described in creativity research as “the standard definition” combines two elements. To originality, it adds fitness for purpose:

“Originality is vital, but must be balanced with fit and appropriateness.”<sup>14</sup>

“Creativity requires both originality and effectiveness”<sup>15</sup>

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254301041\\_Creativity\\_research\\_Originality\\_utility\\_and\\_integration](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254301041_Creativity_research_Originality_utility_and_integration)

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254301596\\_The\\_Standard\\_Definition\\_of\\_Creativity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254301596_The_Standard_Definition_of_Creativity)

Interestingly, these two elements of the standard definition – originality and effectiveness - were echoed in the report *All our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*, prepared 20 years ago for the DFEE by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, which offered this definition:<sup>16</sup>

“Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value.”

and identified five concepts which are embedded in that process:

“Using imagination; a fashioning process; pursuing purposes; being original; judging value.”

For our purposes, another useful insight from the research was an acknowledgement that, in seeking to nurture creativity in young people, it helps to differentiate between:

“the kind of clear-cut genius level creativity that is reserved for the eminent and the great”<sup>17</sup>

and a more personal, everyday version of creativity, manifested in day-to-day problem solving. In the research, these differing versions of creativity are often labelled Big C and little-c. While “Big C” creativity may be the version “reserved for the elite few”, “little-c” refers to the kind of creative thinking and doing that we all find a need to draw on in everyday life, at work and at home.

First mooted in the 1950s, this Big C/little c differentiation was further refined in 2009 in *Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity*<sup>18</sup>. Proposing their Four C model, Kaufman and Beghetto argue that it is helpful to add to the everyday “little-c” the idea of “mini-c” creativity. It is this label which they use to identify the creativity inherent in the learning process, which requires:

“openness to new experiences, active observation, willingness to be surprised and to explore the unknown”

“Mini-c”, they suggest, includes:

“the creative insights displayed by children in their daily activities of learning and play.”

They argue, however, that “mini-c “is not just for kids” .....

“Rather it represents the initial, creative interpretations that all creators have and which later may manifest into recognizable (and in some cases historically celebrated) creations.”

As a companion to “Big-C” Kaufman and Beghetto choose to add the term “Pro-c” in order to represent the creativity inherent in the practice of professional-level expertise in specialist domains. In recent years, the notion of “domain specific” creativity has prompted a long-running dispute amongst researchers - is creativity a generalisable phenomenon, commonly held across a wide range of expert domains

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.readyunlimited.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/all-our-futures1.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273017855\\_A\\_Note\\_on\\_Big-C\\_Creativity\\_and\\_Little-c\\_Creativity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273017855_A_Note_on_Big-C_Creativity_and_Little-c_Creativity)

<sup>18</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228345133\\_Beyond\\_Big\\_and\\_Little\\_The\\_Four\\_C\\_Model\\_of\\_Creativity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228345133_Beyond_Big_and_Little_The_Four_C_Model_of_Creativity)

from, say, music to engineering? Or is it “domain specific”? Is there is one form of creativity or are there many creativities? Plucker and Beghetto<sup>19</sup> give this response:

“We adopt a third, hybrid point of view that balances these two poles. (*This paper*) considers creativity as a partially universal ability with both domain and task-general and specific components. The degree of specificity or generality depends both on the social context and on development from childhood into adulthood.”

They also suggest that creativity arises from “the interaction among aptitude, process and environment by which an individual or groups produce a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context.”

We found this notion of a hybrid model helpful. With its emphasis on the social context and on the stage of development reached by each child, it seemed to us to be highly relevant to our consideration of “teaching for creativity”. We recognised that domain expertise – combining “know how” and “know that” in specific areas – will help shape creative responses within specialist areas and, like the Durham Commission report, we felt that it is vital to recognise that:

“Creativity exists in all disciplines. It is valued by mathematicians, scientists and entrepreneurs, as well as by artists, writers and composers.”

We accepted that for some individual children, manifestations of creativity may emerge uninvited from specific personal enthusiasms. For the lucky ones, these enthusiasms will be linked to growing domain knowledge in a particular field. For some others they will grow out of a chance encounter outside the contexts of formal learning. Some children, especially those growing up in disadvantaged areas, will have scant opportunities for those chance encounters. We did not think that leaving it to chance was good enough. We were convinced that “teaching for creativity” can enrich learning in all disciplines and at very different stages of a child’s development. In a book currently still in press: K. Cohen-Kadosh (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, a chapter by Paul Sowden and Anna R Kauer explores the role of attention in the development of creativity. A pre-publication version can be accessed via the link below.<sup>20</sup>

We agreed with the Durham Commission – and much earlier research in this area - in thinking that all children should be given opportunities to experience learning in ways which are designed, for instance, to:

- Offer them authentic challenges linked to ‘real-world’ problems
- Prompt them to explore alternative ways of being and doing
- Enable them to find personal relevance in their learning
- Invite them to go beyond what is usually expected in the classroom

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<sup>19</sup> [Plucker, J. A., and Beghetto, R. \(2004\). “Why creativity is domain general, why it looks domain specific, and why the distinction does not matter,” in Creativity: From Potential to Realization, eds, R. J. Sternberg, E. L. Grigorenko, and J. L. Singer \(Washington, DC: American Psychological Association\), 153–167.](#)

<sup>20</sup><https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342364919> [The role of attention in the development of creativity](#)

- Welcome their self-expression – for instance, in words, in music, through making, through a campaign, in dance, through collaboration.....
- Enable them to share the results of their thinking and doing with a significant audience.

## **Sharing some current experiences - schools in NW England**

Our participants included many practitioners engaged in researching, supporting and seeking to practise “teaching for creativity”. We asked ourselves questions like:

“How do we understand “Teaching for Creativity”?”

“When do we see it happening in schools? “

“When we encounter evidence of it, what do we observe?”

“What do we think are the levers and barriers preventing more of it taking place?”

Our participants shared their many experiences in response to these questions.

To illustrate these responses, we have chosen to focus here on testimonies which illustrate vividly some of the observations offered by our participants. It is important to stress that these reflections are derived mainly from experiences across one region of England. An aspect of our debate which this underlines, and which is emphasised in the Arts Council’s new 10-year strategy, *Let’s Create*, is that place matters. When faced with the challenge of “teaching for creativity”, the specific local community in which children grow up and in which their school is based, matters. So does the wider region in which each schools sits:

“Taken together, (creativity and culture) can help us make sense of ourselves and of each other: they provoke and uplift us; they unite communities; and they bring us joy. If access to either creativity or culture is limited by where people come from or what they do, the whole of society loses out.”<sup>21</sup>

The Comino Foundation has for some time supported two significant – and related - clusters of activity in schools across Greater Manchester. The first testimony comes from SEERIH<sup>22</sup> (*Science and Engineering Education Research and Innovation Hub*), which works to improve teaching and learning in science and engineering in primary schools across the NW region and beyond.

SEERIH is based at, and supported by, the University of Manchester, in partnership with the Comino Foundation and the Primary Science Teaching Trust.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-vision>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.seerih.manchester.ac.uk/about/>

1. *From Dr Lynne Bianchi, Director of the Science and Engineering Education Research and Innovation Hub at The University of Manchester:*

How do I see ‘Teaching for Creativity’? Is it happening – does SEERIH encounter evidence of it? What are the levers and barriers preventing more of it taking place? What consequences do we observe?

I approach these questions about ‘teaching for creativity’ after nearly 25 years in primary science education and as the Director of the Science & Engineering Education Research and Innovation Hub (SEERIH) at The University of Manchester. Within this position I lead a team of specialists working to inspire communities of creative and curious primary school teachers to engage in professional learning so as to improve the outcomes of children in science and engineering education. As a small team of specialist STEM professionals, we work with around 300 primary schools each year across the 10 Local Authorities of Greater Manchester, yet our reach goes beyond the North West, and filters to national and international platforms via academic and professional committees, publications, talks and resources.

Teaching for Creativity to me is a set of pedagogical approaches, which have as their focus the intent that all learners engage in:

‘Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value.’ (NACCEE report 1999).

I am able to offer an informed response on whether I see Teaching for Creativity happening in schools, based on regular ‘Deep Dives’ which SEERIH offers to schools. SEERIH Deep Dives offer one full-day support to senior leaders in schools, guiding them to evaluate the teaching, learning and assessment of primary science education in their own school.

My experience suggests that ‘teaching for creativity’ happens when children are given agency, choice and capacity to feel they can apply and wield their knowledge and skills in different, dynamic and meaningful ways. It means that children are given the chance to adapt, improve, remodel, reuse and repurpose their learning to create or forge new ideas, ways of working and thinking. In essence they are involved in decision making with purpose.

In primary science, teaching for creativity would be most likely embedded in the way children are taught to ‘work scientifically’ and undertake ‘science enquiry’. Yet, the science enquiry process in many primary classrooms remains relatively linear and not reflective of the iterative, problem-focused endeavour that it could be. We tend to see ‘teaching for creativity’ more often when primary school children are involved in the Engineering Design Process, which captures the pursuit more fully, by expecting children to ‘ask-imagine-plan-create-experiment-improve’. Our work on these approaches - in collaboration with the Royal Academy of Engineering - within our Tinkering-for-Learning programme has shown vividly their impact on children’s engagement and sense of achievement.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/reports/tinkering-for-learning>

In terms of barriers to ‘teaching for creativity’ – I consider there are quite a few. First and foremost, I believe that children can only be creative when they have a good grasp, or mastery, of subject knowledge or skills. The current average of 1-1.5 hours a week teaching time for primary science doesn’t afford children that luxury... a symptom of a curriculum that has been dominated by the government pressure to prioritise Literacy and Numeracy above other core subjects.

Secondly, I see that limited time in classrooms means teachers feel challenged to ‘cover’ or ‘deliver’ a curriculum – which draws away from time to enrich and enable children to play meaningfully as part of their learning. Time constraints and limitations on professional learning also lead to teachers being less knowledgeable and confident in pedagogies which support teaching for creativity. Instead they tend to go down safer, pre-formulated paths to meet generic ‘standards’. In Primary Science in England, we also have one ‘standard’ - to assess children’s attainment, - something that I feel challenges creativity as it moves children to a point of mediocrity and similarity. This is further compounded by the absence of words such as ‘creativity’ or ‘imaginative’ from curriculum documentation – at least ‘curiosity’ gets a mention!

### **So what?**

In my experience, teaching approaches designed for children to develop creativity and demonstrate creative behaviours in primary school are not well understood. There is little professional dialogue or debate about the habits, characteristics and mannerisms that sit with it, or how it links to subject areas such as science. Rarely is there regular training to support it, for teachers to talk about it, see it, interpret it for themselves and then sense it in their classrooms. The implications of making no attempts to change this could be catastrophic, as our lives are increasingly technologically-led, with science and engineering driving innovation throughout our world.

Why then does science have limitations placed upon it in primary schools? Why isn’t innovative and creative thinking more explicitly recognised within it? The reality is that I find ‘teaching for creativity’ is rare. Opportunities like the *Great Science Share for Schools*<sup>24</sup> do work to champion teaching for creativity, and a host of leading teachers, such as those in the Primary Science Teaching Trust College of Fellows, are more likely to demonstrate such skills. However, at present this kind of expertise is an aspiration reserved for the few, rather than for the mass of primary teachers. From where I stand teaching ‘for’ creativity at best requires improvement and on average is in special measures.

Nicola Potts, Headteacher of Christ the King RC Primary School, Walkden, Manchester has worked with SEERIH for some years. She comments:

“My school’s participation in the Tinkering-for-Learning programme, in collaboration with SEERIH at the University of Manchester, has had a significant impact beyond the confines of the project itself. Working with the children to develop the core ‘engineering habit of mind’ of

“Making ‘things’ that work and making ‘things’ work better.”

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<sup>24</sup> [www.greatscienceshare.org](http://www.greatscienceshare.org)

has shifted my teachers' thinking and practice and freed them, as well as the children they teach, to "tinker" – to experiment, to try things out, adjusting and improving, working towards a variety of outcomes."

In a special edition of the Association of Science Education's *Primary Science Journal* – Winter 2016/17, Nicola wrote a full account of this experience and added this note:

### **“From one Headteacher to another:**

Tinkering may or may not be for you, but what I urge you <sup>to</sup> do, through any curriculum development project you choose to adopt, is to lead by example, lead by being part of the development – from the inside and consistently. I attended each and every training event with my teachers – we were a true team, we shared the ups, we shared the downs, but we shared.....

Play – play – and play some more. Trust in staff that they will drive toward high standards – it's what they do best, they have ingrained senses to do the right thing by children. But they need to be fascinated too – they need time to experiment – to talk and 'play with ideas together. They need, and benefit from, external support – the University of Manchester's SEERIH team were our nectar from which we could make honey. All teachers, whatever their age or phase, need to feel the power to create. Invest in failure. We all know that learning comes through failure, so don't fall at the first fence; embody and exemplify the Habits of Mind of: perseverance, problem-finding, creative problem-solving, creativity.

Tinkering made sense to us – it opened a door to our creativity – whether you call it 'Tinkology', tinkering or engineering, we have enjoyed the creative process of making. It has been the thing that has most changed in our classrooms, and when children are making with their hands they are personally seeking to find new ways to learn, new answers to their own questions, new understandings about the world around them. Isn't that what school improvement should be about?"

The testimony which follows comes from a collaboration of secondary schools across Greater Manchester: Its members are: [Abraham Moss Community School](#), Crumpsall, Manchester; [The Derby High School, Bury](#); [Falinge Park High School](#), Rochdale; [Ladybridge High School](#), Bolton; [Fred Longworth High School](#), Wigan; [Sacred Heart Primary School](#), Bolton. This partnership – the North West Comino Creative Consortium – has developed over a period of around ten years. These schools work together, and in partnership with cultural institutions and creative industries across the North West, to nourish the creativity and widen the social opportunities of all students.

2. *From Lynn Provoost - Assistant Headteacher, Arts, Partnerships & Student Development, The Derby High School, Bury, Lancashire. Lynn writes as a representative of the partnership of schools whose collaboration outline here:*

My perspective comes from The North West Comino Creative Consortium(NWCCC): a well-established and successful collaboration of schools across Greater Manchester.

Established now for over ten years, our partnership has grown from strength to strength. Each of our schools is led by a headteacher committed to nurturing “teaching for creativity” and brave enough, even with very limited resource, to invest in providing students and staff with enriching experiences which have helped to establish “teaching for creativity” as a keystone. Each school has a champion for creativity. The voices of these champions are heard loud and clear, not just by our senior leadership teams and governors, but within each of our LEAs and beyond. In every aspect of our work we “teach for creativity.” Fundamentally, the purpose of the work has been to use creative pedagogies in order to enable young people to experience ‘real world’ learning and become more fully aware of their own potential. Our purpose through the work that our partnership has co-created has been to ensure that we broaden students’ knowledge of the outside world and increase their confidence in their own abilities. We offer them experiences which help them to develop an understanding of their own talents and show them how, in the future, their skills and know-how may be applicable in this rapidly changing world.

Many of our young people grow up with a limited range of experiences, so that their choices for the future are made from a narrow set of options. We invest time to ensure that, wherever possible, we provide ‘experiences for all’, which bring not only our students, but also our teachers, into contexts which are unfamiliar to them and where they are in face-to-face contact with professionals they would not otherwise meet. These are professionals who recognise that creativity is at the heart of their capacity to respond effectively to the daily challenges of their work. Our teachers and students collaborate with these professionals, working in school on projects in which the professionals demonstrate aspects of their expertise and the outcomes are co-designed and co-constructed. These outcomes are then shared - they may be presented to a significant audience or displayed in a public space - so that all who participate grow from the experience, celebrate the pleasure of achievement, build valuable networks and come to a better understanding of each other’s needs and wants.

Across the consortium, as professional educators, we constantly review our pedagogy with the aim of unlocking every student’s potential. We know that, in some schools, some students have their talents overlooked because, at present, these talents are not measurable in results tables. Using creative teaching approaches and opening up awareness of domains of professional expertise encourages and motivates many learners and this, in turn, gives them confidence and belief that they can succeed if they learn resilience and adopt a creative approach to their learning. Many students who have worked alongside professionals on these projects have experienced life-changing learning experiences, which have shown them talents they did not know they possessed and have opened doors to careers which require skills beyond those that our current exams system endorse.

As our collaboration in the consortium has grown, each school feels more empowered to reach out to its own community and beyond. We have developed successful models of how education, industry, cultural establishments and the wider community can work together to increase our students' cultural capital and social opportunity. Moreover, through our partnership and the successes we have celebrated, we have clearly demonstrated that meaningful regional collaboration is possible and does make a real and sustained difference to our students' lives.

Our pedagogy, underpinned by a strong belief in the power of creativity, has taken us on an exciting journey. At a time when many schools focus just on delivering the core curriculum, the energy and vision of the consortium means that we have embraced many and varied opportunities to deliver a rich and diverse curriculum, with the arts and creativity given the importance they deserve. We strive for excellence and innovation in all we do. We seek opportunities to deliver 'experiences like no other' both through our curriculum and extensive enrichment provision. Teaching at our schools has become more rich and diverse as a result. We explore every opportunity to innovate and foster creativity.

We greatly value our partnerships because they have allowed us to provide unique, inspirational and truly rich educational experiences which engage our students: the kind of experiences usually open only to students attending elite independent schools.

Our partnership work influences our thinking about teaching and the curriculum. It helps us to promote in students the desire to learn. In addition to ensuring that learners are engaged in a positive and inclusive learning experience in their lessons, we continue to explore innovative ways to build enriching experiences for them. For instance, at Key Stage 4, arts groups form working companies to put on professional standard events that enable all pupils to develop their own particular skills.

In 2019, The Derby High School achieved Artsmark Platinum, influenced by our roles in NWCCC and by involvement with our Local Cultural Educational Partnerships. We have collaborated with the many local cultural organisations in our communities and our aim is to unite our school communities in exciting cultural and educational programmes which will see our students, parents and staff regularly engaging with the many rich and diverse cultural experiences in and around our community. However, this requires already extremely hardworking members of a committed team to invest even more time. This may be the stumbling block for many partnerships. Work needs to be done here to see how time can be allocated to release project leaders from schools in order to work with cultural organisations and industry to plan programmes which can have significant impact on the lives of our young people.

## Putting Teaching for Creativity into practice

### What further help will schools in England need post COVID 19?

This consultation took place just before the Covid 19 lock-down. Most of us had not yet recognised the likelihood that the virus could well change the English educational landscape – and indeed the culture in which it sits - for all of us. Even without the knowledge of the full scale of the challenges the pandemic would present, we had concerns about the journey ahead of us. Even without a full appreciation of the likely challenges ahead, we did not underestimate the difficulties inherent in working towards the *Let's Create* vision of an England where

“the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish.”

We agreed with the Durham Commission's analysis that:

“While no one school in England is the same as another, there are five key forces that influence what happens in all schools. These are:

- the ways the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) measures success;
- the National Curriculum and what it requires schools to teach;
- external tests or examinations and what they specify in their syllabuses;
- the morale, calibre, confidence and professional development of heads and teachers;
- the amount of funding available.”

This analysis was reinforced by the *BritainThinks* survey commissioned by the Commission. The survey showed that:

“headteachers and school governors value creativity, with 99% agreeing that it is important to support creativity and creative thinking in schools (BritainThinks, 2019). But often teaching for creativity is subordinate to other pressures such as shortage of resources, both human and financial, particularly in schools in less advantaged areas.”

The Windsor group supported the Durham Commission's recommendations and were keen to support the realisation of the *Let's Create* vision of a future England as a “creative and cultural country” where “creative people” live and thrive in “cultural communities”. “Culture” is of course another of those words which carries a weight of associations, some of which are unhelpful. While understanding why *Let's Create* emphasises “culture”, we were disappointed that it chose to link it to a seemingly narrowed version of the Durham Commission's definition of creativity:

“While creativity is present in all areas of life, in this Strategy, we use it specifically to refer to the process of making, *producing or participating in* ‘culture’.”

Like the Durham Commission, we wanted schools at all times to be encouraged to embrace a vision of creativity as something which is seen to be at home “In all areas of life, from the sciences and humanities to the arts” ... “as the ability to think laterally and come up with imaginative solutions to problems, to work across disciplines or to enjoy constructive play.”

Post COVID 19, a number of questions need to be addressed urgently by policy makers responsible for supporting the thriving of education throughout England. To secure “teaching for creativity” for all children in England, we need to ask:

### **1. How can the fear in the system be reduced?**

At all stages of the curriculum, Windsor participants had observed teachers who have become reluctant to step outside the routines of a pedagogy which focuses solely on progress as measured by the test/exam results on which schools have been judged in recent years. If this risk-aversion of teachers is to be lessened, we agreed that schools will need the courageous leadership of headteachers who are whole-heartedly committed to a wider vision of the purpose of schools. How might this be achieved? Like the Durham Commission we hoped that the new OFSTED framework will help reduce the fear in the system:

“There is a real opportunity within the new framework to develop ambitious approaches to encouraging creativity and teaching for creative thinking in schools.”

but we felt that much depends on how the framework’s emphasis on “quality of education” is interpreted in practice by inspection teams. We agreed that it would be helpful for OFSTED to

“share good practice case studies of teaching for creativity in a range of subjects and across phases” and “to continue to refine its inspection framework to further reduce incentives to ‘teach to the mark’.”

.....but we wondered how school leaders, including governors, would be supported to bring about the changes in their school culture which will be necessary if such “ambitious approaches” are to flourish. We agreed that “system leadership which enables schools to collaborate” in their implementation of teaching for creativity would be helpful, but we were cautious about how the proposed group of nine Creative Collaboratives would be identified and how their collaboration would work in practice.

### **2. How can schools “teach for creativity” when their resources are so stretched?**

All our participants recognised that schools have been grappling for years with significant shortage of resource. Financial resources have been tight in schools in England for years. The IFS reported in November 2019:

“In the 2019 Spending Round, the government committed to increase school spending by £4.3 billion (in today’s prices) by 2022, with the first part of the money delivered next year. This would near enough reverse the cuts to school spending per pupil seen over the last decade.

Still, even if this funding is delivered in full, it would leave spending per pupil about the same level in 2022 as it was 13 years earlier in 2009. This represents a substantial squeeze on

school resources as compared with recent history. The previous lowest growth over a 13-year period was an 18% increase between 1987 and 2000.”<sup>25</sup>

A report by the Education Policy Institute<sup>26</sup> following the March 2020 budget speculated on the likely impact of the funding pledges made by the government at that point. Now we also have to speculate about the likely impact of Covid19 on the government’s capacity to fulfil its pre-election promises to increase investment in English schools substantially over the next three years.

Schools have for years been finding it difficult to recruit and retain staff with the personal resources to enable them respond to the challenges and pressures that confront them daily in an inadequately resourced system. In what is seen as a crowded curriculum, time and energy are frequently reported as scarce resources for both teachers and pupils. Post Covid 19 lock down, these resources are likely to be in even more short supply.

### **3. Will effective and relevant high quality professional development for both newly qualified and established teachers be more readily available in the near future? Will the professional development that is planned support “teaching for creativity”?**

Will the proposed Early Career Framework help the newly-qualified teach for creativity?<sup>27</sup> Having looked at the proposed elements of the “two-year package”, many of our participants were doubtful. Will those areas involved in the “early rollout”<sup>28</sup> of this programme be able to influence the programme – will they be invited to evaluate it? Our participants from rollout areas were keen to be involved.

We wondered if there would be scope to engage established teachers in a related development programme which would enable them to enrich their practice and be supportive of newly-qualified teachers seeking to develop a versatile range of pedagogies. We wanted to see more teachers having the opportunity to engage in small scale action research, such as that supported by the EEDnet<sup>29</sup> - which would offer one way to explore the impact of different pedagogies. Some of our participants suggested that ‘schools might host ‘researchers in residence’.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/election/2019/article/school-spending>

<sup>26</sup> <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/school-funding-budget-2020/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-early-career-teachers/rollout-of-early-career-framework-support-package>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-early-career-teachers/rollout-of-early-career-framework-support-package>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.expansiveeducation.net/page-1730519>

#### **4. How might school leaders be helped to build the committed energy needed to articulate this shared vision and purpose reported by the Durham Commission?**

“Schools told the Commission that they would like leadership teams to be able to develop and articulate a shared vision and purpose for creativity”

We were struck by the irony that there is already an emerging “shared vision” internationally. England, oddly, remains an outlier. We agreed with the vision set out in 2019 by the Creative Learning Alliance<sup>30</sup> for a “national plan for cultural learning.” We also we wanted school leaders to be supported in the process of bringing into being that broader vision of creativity that the Durham Commission articulated so powerfully.

#### **5. What might be done to help ‘teaching for creativity’ in those schools based in towns and in regions where accessible cultural and creative resources are thin on the ground?**

*Let’s Create* makes a powerful argument for equity in the provision of

‘opportunities for children and young people to experience creativity and culture inside and outside school’

and recognises that such opportunities:

‘are not equal across the country’.

We agreed. *Let’s Create* presents a vision for the next 10 years, in which the Arts Council for England will:

“focus a large part of our development role on ensuring that children and young people are able to fulfil their creative potential, and access the highest-quality cultural experiences where they live, where they go to school and where they spend their free time.”

It is a vision which the Windsor group supported wholeheartedly, but we felt that *Let’s Create* itself recognised that in some communities there would be few partners able to work with schools to help bring about that vision. Consider, for instance, its suggestion that the already-threatened, and in many places closed, public libraries are ‘a vital resource’ in achieving this vision:

“At a local level, we will work with partners to support inclusive economic growth through investment in libraries, museums and arts venues to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose and able to meet the needs of their communities and the people who work and create within them. We will also make the case for investing in appropriate new cultural buildings to drive local economic regeneration.”

“We believe that England’s network of public libraries provides a vital resource for the development of creativity and the promotion of culture across this country. They are the country’s most widespread and well-used cultural spaces, sitting at the heart of communities

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<sup>30</sup> <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/CLA-3-asks-November-2019.pdf>

and often providing the first point of access to cultural activity. They help to build stronger, happier communities, support social prescribing, develop readers and promote digital literacy. They will be central to our delivery of this Strategy, and over the next 10 years we will increase our investment in them.”<sup>31</sup>

If our aim is to provide equity of access to cultural experiences which will inspire young people “to fulfil their creative potential” and underpin “teaching for creativity”, for children in schools throughout the country, then in each region it will be necessary:

- to convince parents and governors that such experiences contribute significantly to the well-being and blossoming of all the children in their care
- to help local areas promote and sustain community infrastructures which welcome young people and are resourceful in engaging with their enthusiasms
- to prompt creative industries and cultural institutions to reach out to communities beyond their immediate vicinity
- to enable schools to draw on diverse professional expertise to work alongside teachers: software developers, graphic designers, architects, engineers, researchers, film-makers, journalists.....
- to find ways of enabling young people and their schools to encounter and understand the ever-widening range of 21<sup>st</sup> century employment opportunities.

Let’s do it.

José Chambers  
Development Fellow, Comino Foundation

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/how-we-will-achieve-it>

## **“Teaching for Creativity”**

**St GEORGE’S HOUSE, Windsor Castle 4-5 March 2020**

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