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Creative partnerships - the impact of creative collaboration between artists and schools/young people

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Risking Creativity: culture, education and the transformation of learning? A working study of the Creative Partnerships programme 2002-2006.

Maria Balshaw, September 2006

In the face of dramatic shifts in global and local senses of what constitutes society, culture and work in the 21st Century it is perhaps unsurprising that the past few years have seen a resurgence in thinking, writing and policy making about supporting and developing creativity. In the past decade writers and thinkers of all stripes have been moved to ponder the role of creativity in building cohesive societies, in supporting dynamic cities and regions and, increasingly, in generating economic wealth as well as wellbeing. Since 1997, the Blair government has fostered a significant shift in funding and thinking within the cultural sector toward supporting the broader social reach of the arts and cultural practice. It has also, through a number of funded schemes, made explicit links between cultural practice, learning and young people's life chances[1] as an attempt, some would argue, to deliver instrumental gains through artistic means.

My thoughts in this essay are stimulated by observation and involvement in the national Creative Partnerships scheme as Director of Creative Partnerships Birmingham from 2002 until 2005 and by a period of research leave, supported by the Clore Leadership programme, which gave me the opportunity to step back and reflect on the programme and practice I had been involved in developing and implementing. This essay is not a quantitative study of the impact of the Creative Partnerships programme; rather it presents a critical analysis of the shifting policy context for creative education practice and seeks to problematise some of the

[1] These include Youth Music Action Zones, support by the Lottery funded Foundation for Youth Music; Creative Partnerships, supported by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) through Arts Council England (ACE); Cultural Hubs, support by ACE; Renaissance in the Regions Museums Programme, supported by the DCMS though the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council; the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA), supported by the DCMS through Lottery funding.

assumptions that underpin this kind of policy initiative. By examining some of the successes and limitations of the current field of creative education I move toward some tentative suggestions about ways forward for the cultural and education sector.

It is useful first to set out the history and context for the emergence of the Creative Partnerships (CP) programme. The policy background history to Creative Partnerships is a very interesting one. For many people, at the time and looking back, Creative Partnerships, along with a number of other programmes like NESTA, Youth Music and Culture Online, emanate from *All Our Futures*, the seminal report published in September 2000 of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE), chaired by Sir Ken Robinson. The NACCCE was set up in 1998 by David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education and Employment and Chris Smith, then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport with terms of reference to:

> make recommendations to the Secretaries of State on the creative and cultural development of young people through formal and informal education: to take stock of current provision and to make proposals for principles, policy and practice. (*All Our Futures*, p.2)

This report, and Robinson's subsequent book, *Out of our Minds*[2], proposed a critical connection between the educational right to creative and cultural experience for young people and the future health and wealth of society. The report advocates creative education, 'that will develop young people's capacities for original ideas and action … forms that enable young people to engage positively with the growing complexity and diversity of social values and ways of life' (*All Our Futures*, p.5). The range of respected figures on the Committee and the clarity and call to action embodied in the report, meant that it has had an affect down the years perhaps disproportionate with its impact at the time.

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[2] Ken Robinson, *Out Of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*, 2001.

Certainly, there was no immediate implementation of its many recommendations. In terms of the Creative Partnerships programme, however, it is in this report that one first sees its name used formally, albeit with small rather than capital letters:

> A number of initiatives are now being taken by Arts Council England … and by the DCMS to monitor and evaluate educational provision by publicly funded cultural organisations, including arts education agencies. These should also improve the quality of creative partnerships. (p. 8)

Before exploring further the contradictions between the ambition set out in the NACCCE report and the policy follow through that one sees in Government papers from 2000 onwards it is worthwhile sketching out the wider policy background to the setting up of a committee like NACCCE. As New Labour established themselves in power from 1997, one of the most fundamental policy drivers was a determination to address issues of social exclusion across all policy areas, not through raising taxes and offering generalised aid, but through the explicit targeting of the most in need, and through the introduction of 'joined-up government' – to use the buzz phrase of the time.

The Treasury was crucial in driving this work, in that it was instrumental in setting up the Social Exclusion Unit, which rapidly became a major policy force. The Social Exclusion Unit sponsored the work of a series of Policy Action Teams, who were tasked to analyse and make recommendations across all Government departments about how each department was and could address issues of social exclusion. These PAT reports were published in 1999/2000 and became the framework by which departments could bid for Treasury money to tackle social exclusion issues. The DCMS was examined via PAT 10, and this report made challenging recommendations about how culture, and cultural organisations

could be supported, and indeed funded, to realise explicit social outcomes for those most economically and socially disadvantaged[3].

> Art can not only make a valuable contribution to delivering key outcomes of lower long-term unemployment, less crime, better health and better qualifications, but can also help develop the individual pride, community spirit and capacity for responsibility that enable communities to run regeneration programmes themselves.[4]

The PAT report sits behind the decision to set up the NACCCE work. One might argue that it was in fact more powerful than *All Our Futures*, though with a considerably lower public profile. Its importance lies in the fact that in the name of addressing social exclusion, it made absolutely explicit the case that art and culture should result in socially transformative outcomes; and it tied doing this to the promise of more funds. For bodies like the Arts Council and Resource (now the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) and for major cultural organisations, this was both recognition and promise of financial reward that had been long absent. It did, though, crash firmly into an age old debate about the role and purpose of culture and the arts, which has caused long term problems for the arts and cultural sectors, not to mention for politicians and policy makers.[5] As Jon Neelands has argued:

> The New Labour 'Third Way' approach merges a limited redistribution of various forms of capital, including economic capital, but also educational and other forms of social and cultural capital, with the active recognition of

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[3] DCMS (1999) Policy Action Team 10, Report to the Social Exclusion Unit, Arts and Sport.
[4] Ibid.
[5] The debate about excellence versus access, as it has come to be known, goes back to at least the 19th Century. For the fundamental background to this argument see Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, entry on Culture. For a more recent assessment of this debate see Tessa Jowell, (2004) *Government and the Value of Culture* and John Holden, *Capturing Cultural Value*, Demos, 2004.

> the 'cultural citizenship' and 'self-realisation' rights of disadvantaged groups in the symbolic processes of culture.[6]

This means that, as Belfiore has argued, 'debates on possible ways to tackle social exclusion and debates on the role of the subsidised arts in society, have intertwined'.[7] Looking back at the beginnings of this 'third way' thinking from the perspective of 2006, it is remarkable to note how rapidly this has become the status quo in policy terms. In its current strategic plan, Arts Council England articulates as its primary purpose, 'placing the arts at the heart of national life, and people at the heart of the arts'[8]: a text-book third way statement. Yet there has been no quietening of the opposite position articulating a spirited defence of the right to art in and of itself[9]. The inability to think outside these polarities is perhaps one of the biggest unmet challenges of cultural policy, theory and practice.[10]

On the other hand, the very positive aspect of the PAT reports was a genuine attempt to diagnose and address issues of chronic social, economic and cultural deprivation and to address them in a coordinated way that emphasised working in partnership across Government departments. In this sense, the formulation of cultural and creative education policy became part of a mainstream shift toward multi agency working; Creative Partnerships and the many other cultural programmes developed in the early 2000s take their place alongside SureStart,

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[6] John Neelands, Viv Freakley, Geoff Lindsay. (2005) 'Things can only get better – A study of Social-Market Interventions in the Shaping of the Field of Cultural Production' Unpublished Essay, University of Warwick.

[7] Eleonora Belfiore, 'Art as a Means of Alleviating Social Exclusion, Does it Really Work? A Critique of Instrumental Cultural Policies and Social Impact Studies in the UK', p.99.

[8] Arts Council England, Corporate Plan, 2006.

[9] See, in particular, Tessa Jowell, Government and the Value of Culture; but also, in the more academic terrain, Terry Eagleton, ;The Death of Criticism' Inaugural Lecture, University of Manchester, October 2006.

[10] On this see John Holden, Creating Cultural Value, p.9–14.

New Deal for Communities, Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zones and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

One of the consequences of the work of the Policy Action Teams, and the *All Our Futures* report was that the then Minister for Culture, Chris Smith, was able to make the case to Treasury for much more generous funding settlement for the arts than any previously seen.[11] The Arts Council England also played a crucial role, in that they seized on these opportunities to make the case for their role in allocating this money in support of programmes they were already running on a smaller scale, or work that they were seeing emerge from their portfolio of Regularly Funded Organisations.[12]

By 2000, with the publication of *Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years*, there was a clearly articulated commitment to an apparently joined-up approach to supporting arts and creativity and the creation of some very high profile government sponsored programmes to make a difference to the arts and cultural sector and to the future creativity of the UK.[13] The report set out a commitment to Creative Partnerships (now capitalised) as a major policy initiative, to sustained increases in Arts Council funding for the cultural sector, to making admission to National galleries and museums free, the NESTA creative industries incubation programme and Culture Online. Chris Smith's executive

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[11] Chris Smith has commented, 'I got the money out of Gordon Brown, if with some difficulty, and the Arts Council distributed in an intelligent way. The artists create; but governments can create a climate in which it's easier for them to create.' The Observer, 15th October, 2006, Review Section, p.6.

[12] Based on personal conversation with Pauline Tambling, then Head of Development for Arts Council England The programmes ACE was able to cite, and indeed take Ministers to see, included the work of Vic Ecclestone in the Hartcliffe and Withywood Estates in Bristol, where he brought large scale touring organisations like Birmingham Royal Ballet and Welsh National Opera to work with disengaged boys from the local estate; the CAPE programme in Leeds and Manchester, evaluated by the NFER in 2002, see www.cape-uk.org.uk; and the Arts Council supported, AEI programme, in Corby and Bristol, also evaluated by the NFER.

[13] DCMS (2000), *Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years.*

summary of the Green Paper sets out an extraordinarily powerful and all encompassing vision of support for artistic excellence going hand in hand with access for all to that excellence. Government investment would compensate for accident of geography or birth by ensuring that those from the poorest communities would be offered those opportunities ordinarily the provenance of the middle classes. This egalitarian vision is underpinned by four key principles:

> Excellence: the need to sustain and encourage the very best in arts and culture…Second, access: the wish to make cultural quality available to the greatest possible number of people…Third, Education: the need to ensure, both in the formal school system and through life, that artistic creativity forms a central part of what is offered as a learning experience. And fourth, the creative economy: the recognition that creativity and those enterprises that rely on creative ideas for their added value are an increasingly vital part of our national economy. (Culture and Creativity, p. 7)

This vision for a creative future was certainly in line with that set out in *All Our Futures* and it was a policy direction that was warmly welcomed across the arts, cultural and education sectors. What was much less clear was how such a sustained commitment to 'access **to** excellence' would be facilitated either within the cultural sector or within education.

The shift in the education policy context since 1997 has been, if possible, still more contested and contradictory. The period after the Labour victory saw a refinement of the prescription of the National Curriculum, national strategies for literacy and numeracy, and while Blair's 'Education, education, education' emphasis did bring in substantial increases in funding, particularly to deprived communities, it did so initially to implement highly prescriptive programmes of improvement. By 2000, as one can see in the NACCCE report, substantial

concerns about the limitations of the prescription and testing formula was articulated in a renewed interest in and campaign for more creative education.

In the last few years we have seen review of the more prescriptive elements of the National Curriculum as the notable gains in SATS and GCSE scores associated with government improvement strategies have reached a plateau. There has been a perceptible shift away from a wholly content driven curriculum toward one that explores how learning happens in more open-ended creative ways. The work of *All Our Futures* can be felt here, but just as significant has been the writing of theorists like Edward De Bono and Guy Claxton, whose advocacy of creative thinking skills has had a notable impact across schools in England. In the past couple of years there has been much evidence of this shift in mainstream educational policy, from the new Primary Strategy, 'Excellence and Enjoyment in Primary Schools', to some short but influential Ofsted reports, to major pieces of work from the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA) on the role of the arts and creativity and position papers by writers like David Hargreaves[14].

Within the education system currently there is a (welcome) renewed interest in creativity and the arts. Government ministers from James Purnell to David Lammy to Andrew Adonis have gone on the record about the critical need to support and develop young people's creativity, if we are to prepare them adequately for the rapidly changing world of work they will find themselves in once they leave school. The Department for Education and Skills and the DCMS have recently repeated the joint approach to policy action that characterised their approach to the NACCCE report and Creative Partnerships in commissioning

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[14] DFES. (2003) Excellence and Enjoyment – A Strategy for Primary Schools; David Hargreaves, *Education Epidemic*, 2003; OFSTED (2003a) *Improving City Schools: How the arts can help.* HMI 1709; OFSTED (2003b), *Expecting the Unexpected: Developing creativity in primary and secondary schools*. HMI 1612; QCA websites, Arts Alive and Creativity: Find It, Promote It.

'Nurturing Creativity in Young People: A Report to Government to inform Future Policy', coordinated by Paul Roberts and the arts and cultural sector is part of this debate, with programmes like Creative Partnerships, the national museums Renaissance in the Regions programme, and cultural organisations more broadly articulating more confidently the value of their education work.[15]

Yet, there is little sign that the National Curriculum will be relaxed and creative work competes on a fairly uneven playing field with National Literacy and Numeracy strategies, while the move to more vocational education at secondary school level and more training for young people post – 16 as well as the government push to make as many secondary schools as possible become Specialist Colleges (of Performing Arts or Science or Maths) mean that on the ground schools are feeling great pressure to fit everything in within curriculum divisions and a timetable that are largely unchanged since the 19th Century.[16]

Outside the formal policy context the late 1990s and early 2000s saw other important texts make still more explicit the argument that a knowledge economy and a knowledgeable society actively requires the capacity for open ended thinking, flexibility and tolerance for risk and failure typically fostered by imaginative practice. Most significant of these would be the body of works emanating from Demos, throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly, Tom Bentley's *The Creative Age*. Demos functioned throughout this period as a thinktank working across policy and disciplinary boundaries, moving between education, cultural policy, employment and economic development and broader issues relating to democratic functioning. It was, in many ways, the informal space where the more radical policy ideas for New Labour could be debated, formulated and tested (and some might argue, contained without an absolute requirement for policy action).

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[15] Paul Roberts, 'Nurturing Creativity in Young People: A Report to Government to inform Future Policy' (2006).
[16] See Ken Robinson, Out of Our Minds.

More recently urban theorists such as Doreen Massey, Nigel Thrift and Richard Florida have framed an argument about quality of life in cities that focuses not simply on the need for creativity for economic advantage but on the ways in which perceptions about the creative energy of cities and spaces – the prized 'boho buzz' – contribute to quality of life and the perceived advantages of one place over another[17]. In Florida's argument, the presence of a creative class of people, those tasked with doing the work of imagination in a culture, and the types of social practices they bring with them – art making, galleries, performance spaces, coffee houses, online culture, nightlife – is itself the driver for economic and social health.

In the commercial sector, there has been a sustained interest in creativity. The proliferation of web based companies associated with the dotcom boom rather rapidly disappeared as the market crashed. But the looser, more informal organisational structures and working practices associated with these companies has endured better.. Companies like Innovara and What If! have had a profound effect on organisational development and management theory, and the creative industries, more broadly defined, are now recognised as the major growth area for the UK economy, growing twice as fast as the overall economy.[18] Thinking about how to support and develop the knowledge economy is the current obsession of politicians, policy makers and cultural theorists more generally. As James Purnell, then Minister for Creative Industries, argued last June, supporting the creative industries means thinking about how to support and nurture young people's creative talent. In an argument that repeats and amplifies Tom Bentley's arguments in the mid 1990s, it is only by thinking rather differently about how we develop the skills and creativity of young people will we develop the skills needed to retain the creative advantage in a hugely competitive global market.

[17] Doreen Massey et al.,Cities for the many not the few; Richard Florida, The Rise of the Creative Class.

[18] See What If?, *Sticky Wisdom: Creative Ways to Revolutionise Your Workplace*.

> Britain has an enviable creative heritage and world class creative industries … we need a fresh impetus that builds on this rich tradition if we are to remain successful in a global marketplace …and must look at what more we can do to nurture young creative talent.[19]

All of this is undoubtedly important; and Purnell only restates here the central argument behind Chris Smith's ten year vision set out in 2000. What has been overlooked, however, is the extent to which one would require fundamental culture and system change in both education and the arts if one was to be able to realise this vision. The inability to see the way towards transformative rather than affirmative forms of action has meant that policy thinking has either been insufficiently bold, or has got mired in other intractable arguments.[20] We shall see this played out in my analysis of the implementation of the Creative Partnerships programme. Before I examine this, though, it is worth teasing out some of the contradictions and overlooked aspects of the policy context I have just mapped.

What is most often overlooked, if one *reads All Our Futures*, is the fact that it begins its argument by calling for 'reviewing some of the most basic assumptions about education'(p.3) in the light of changing societal needs, patterns of work and social and technological conditions. The report then turns away from the radical proposition that one might need to completely rethink school to focus instead on 'rebalancing' the curriculum away from academic principles towards embracing an approach to creative and cultural education that would help support young peoples social and communicative skills to allow them to thrive better in an

[19] James Purnell, Making Britain the World's Creative Hub, Speech to the IPPR, 2005.
[20] The distinction between affirmative and transformational action is one drawn by Nancy Fraser. She argues, 'The distinction between 'affirmative' and 'transformative' action refers to the difference between affirmative action that 'seeks to correct inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them' and 'transformative' action that 'seeks to correct inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework', Fraser, 1995: p.82.

increasingly fast-paced and diverse society.[21] In doing this it leaves a number of things unexplored. Firstly, there is a rather dangerous conflation of culture and creativity. Although the report argues that cultural education, 'forms of education that enable young people to engage positively with the growing complexity and diversity of social values and ways of life' (All our Futures, p. 4) is necessary in order that creativity, 'imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value' (p.4) it does not explain how one relates to another, nor does it ever consider that the experience of both will produce anything except a positive, transformative experience for young people.

What sits behind these assumptions, and indeed behind the marshalling of the four key objectives, 'excellence, access, education and creativity' in Chris Smith's introduction to the 2000 Green Paper, is a series of truisms that don't necessarily help us understand how to support the arts or creativity as part of young people's learning. The first is that access to a wide-ranging set of cultural experiences will necessarily make for rounded, happier, more employable young adults. What haunts this argument is a model middle class teenager who has access to all the culture he or she could wish for and turns out to be a productive, healthy young person. Later speeches by Ministers of Culture in defence of the role of the arts make this rather more explicit. Tessa Jowell described Creative Partnerships in 2003 as, 'an investment in the personal social capital of young people in 16 deprived areas'[22] There is the obvious point to be made that few middle class teenagers make their way through their acquisition of social capital as model citizens. Another would be that it is the case that it is still merely an assertion that more access to culture – an enrichment or affirmative model – makes for

[21] Other commentators, notably Tom Bentley and David Hargreaves have gone rather further in terms of thinking about the reform of the Fordist model of education in this country. See Tom Bentley, 'Address to Creative Partnerships Directors Conference', June 2003 and Hargreaves, Education Epidemic.
[22] Tessa Jowell, 'Speech for Culture and Creativity Conference at the British Museum, 27th March, 2003, p.7.

more socially competent individuals, however intuitively we may feel this to be true.[23]

I make this point not to undermine the importance of access to culture for young people, but to draw attention to the distinction between experiencing cultural work, being creative, and being a well-equipped economic citizen. It is important to do this, because without doing this we miss out something fundamental to many of the more creative aspects of the arts. A look at research into the fundamentals of creative thinking is useful here. Arthur Cropley identifies 6 key features:

Divergent thinking
Risk taking and tolerance of failure
Persistence
A commitment to working toward open ended outcomes
Non-time limited exploration
Resistance, boundaries or rules to challenge[24]

It is likely that the work of artists or creative practitioners very often demonstrates such traits. One of the important things we do culturally is to allow artists to take up the position of the challenger of the status-quo: the permitted divergent thinker. It is for this reason that many of those who are held in highest artistic regard are allowed to be exceptionally difficult. There is no guarantee, however, that exposure to the arts and culture for young people, will necessarily cultivate creative thinking – as we shall see in the following analysis of Creative Partnerships. This will only come through those types of creative arts practice that encourage such open ended exploration. More importantly, if this kind of practice is supported and encouraged, there is no guarantee that schools, parents or employers would necessarily appreciate the divergent thinking, with all the awkwardness it might spark, that young people might produce.

[23] See Sara Selwood, 'Unreliable Evidence: The Rhetorics of Data Collection in the Cultural Sector', 2006.
[24] Arthur J. Cropley, Creativity ….

To return to that overlooked premise in *All Our Futures*, without a fundamental overhaul of education systems, it is unlikely schools will ever be able to fully support young people's creativity, or properly engage with arts and cultural practice. As debates have played out over the five years since Smith's call for 'excellence and access, education and creativity', the arts and cultural sector has let itself be diverted, again, by the rather unproductive polarity between the intrinsic value of the arts or its socially instrumental benefits.[25] Instead, one might rather wish to ask, what kind of benefits does engagement with the arts and artists offer? Will it always be positive for young people or for wider society? And do we need to embrace a more radical position that supporting creative thinking, as we often see it practiced by artists, might help develop a generation of awkward sods, which might in fact be exactly what we need to cope with 'an increasingly diverse society'? These might not, though, be the well adjusted citizens schools are configured to respond to, nor whom politicians would necessarily wish to embrace? This, as we shall see, is a fundamental question raised by the CP programme.

Creative Partnerships in Practice: Birmingham

So what was Creative Partnerships then? The programme was set up as a national creative education programme funded by the DCMS, who provided the majority of the funds through Arts Council England, supported by the Department for Education and Skills, who contributed a much smaller sum of money. It was resourced initially to the tune of £40 million pounds over two years. It was set up as a pilot action research scheme in 16 areas across the country selected on the basis of their multiple indices of deprivation. In 2004 this pilot was extended until 2008 and across 36 areas across the country, involving all of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas in England. Each Creative Partnership area works with between 15 and 30 schools to build sustainable partnerships between creative

[25] See Tessa Jowell, Government and the Value of Culture.

and cultural organisations and individuals and educational settings from nurseries to Sixth Form colleges. These partnerships are designed to extend creative learning opportunities for young people across the school curriculum and across formal and informal learning settings. There were 376 schools involved in the first phase and more than 100,000 pupils were involved in over 5 million learning hours. In the second phase these numbers have expanded to more than 1000 schools (nearly 10% of schools across the country) and the number of pupils involved has exceed 350,000.

But what was the programme set up to do? Again it is useful to look back to the policy documents that underpinned the programme, and to view the early work of the programme in the light of these. In 2002 a PSA target was agreed with Treasury to introduce at least 12 Creative Partnerships programmes across the country; and a policy and delivery agreement was drawn up between the Arts Council, the DCMS and the DFES with the following aim:

> X identify effective, sustainable partnerships between schools and arts, cultural and creative organisations and individuals, leading to the development of a national strategy.[26]

There were then set out a number of core objectives that described the development of a programme that would expand cultural opportunities for young people and their schools, develop a range of creative teaching skills, build the capacity of both cultural and education sector and provide rigorous evidence of the impact for all involved. These objectives were underpinned by a rather strange mixture of outcomes, like increased confidence for young people', 'enhanced knowledge of the creative sector' and a smaller number of outputs like 'increased attendance at arts and cultural events'. Taken together it presented a rather alarming mixture, as it typified the kind of slippage I noted above between creative approaches to learning apparently leading to more attendance at arts events. What was very important in this first policy framework, however, was a commitment to piloting that at least entertained the possibility of some risk taking.

[26] Creative Partnerships Policy and Delivery Framework – 2002 -2004: p.8.

Ultimately the programme was tasked to 'identify effective, sustainable partnerships…' There was no defined assumption of what those partnerships should look like. This gave an impetus to some bold thinking, especially from those areas, like Birmingham, where there had been a long history of steady engagement between education and the cultural sector. In areas like this, where the arts education infrastructure was strong, this programme, tasked to pilot and document good practice, seemed like an opportunity to test some new ideas, and not be too cautious to risk failure. The first Director, Peter Jenkinson, actively encouraged risk taking and the freedom of decent resources certainly spurred the cultural sector and schools to do some big thinking together about how they might engage young people meaningfully in creative practice and creative thinking.

The contested and contradictory cultural field that CP emerges from means that the initial pilot, or risk impetus, was very hard to maintain. It was a highly charged political environment where it bumped into all sorts of existing practice, competing agendas, egos and rivalries – as a well as the old as the hills debate about access versus excellence. Being part of a high profile named initiative meant close (and oft uncomfortable) government scrutiny: Treasury-set PSA targets meant that the programme was struggling to imagine a radical shift in creative education practice at the same time as chasing bums on seats style outputs, which in its early days it certainly did not meet. The need to try some new and risky approaches to engaging young people from some of the countries most challenging schools in arts practice had to be held against the very public and very damaging possibility of being judged to fail. More fundamentally, there was a difficult contradiction to face. Deciding that poor people need more culture in their lives, as a remedy to their social ills has a history that goes back at least to the Victorians. And any programmatic attempt to use culture instrumentally is open to this charge of patronising philanthropy.

On the other hand there have been some benefits to this uncomfortable location. Creative Partnerships as a national programme currently allocates £32 per annum across the country to support creative work with young people. In 2005-6 the programme in Birmingham had a budget of £1.3 million to support work across 50 schools, with substantial amounts of other partnership funding, in cash and in-kind, being contributed by schools and cultural organisations. This is an enormous amount of money in a sector where things are usually funded very badly. As an action research programme, a programme set up to pilot possibilities and take risks, Creative Partnerships tried to, along with the work of creative educators in galleries, museums, performing arts and elsewhere, model what creative learning could look like; learning fit for the 21st Century and more importantly better suited to the needs and desires of young people. What the schools involved with Creative Partnerships Birmingham had in common, along with many others in the city and across the country, was a desire to develop young people's creativity as a core, rather than peripheral, part of their learning in school. They, to a school, feel this still to be one of the most difficult things to attend to as part of the daily business of school.

The climate for risk taking within Creative Partnerships did not hold for very long at the policy level. By 2004, after some of the first phase areas had built notable success, and others had struggled to get going at all, or had run into serious local political difficulties – all in the nature of a 'pilot programme' one might think – the Arts Council took much stronger centralised control of the programme, appointed a new Director and the second Policy Framework for 2004–2006 seeks to 'foster effective partnerships … to deliver high quality cultural and creative opportunities'.[27] It was backed up by a much more stringent set of required numerical outputs relating to number of young people involved, projects, visits and attendances supported, and the number of schools receiving the CP 'service'. It did, however, also hold on to the requirement to support creative learning outcomes for those young people involved; they should be able to 'apply

[27] Creative Partnerships Policy and Delivery Framework, 2004-2006: p. 8

learning across contexts, identify problems and ask unusual questions, explore and generate new ideas'.[28] Again, the relationship between the numerical outputs and the desire creative outcomes was assumed rather than understood within the policy frame. There is a fundamental tussle at the heart of the work promoted by Creative Partnerships and many other cultural educators. We seem ready to accept the arguments of thinkers like Ken Robinson, Tom Bentley and Richard Florida, that creativity is a vital requirement for 21st century learning, for our economy and for society itself. However, we are still struggling with highly instrumental methods of measuring and demonstrating that creativity works, for learning or for life. Put crudely, the educational system needs still to know whether being creative makes children do better in tests – because tests scores are still the mass measuring tool for school performance. In the same vein, the cultural sector is too often required to ask did getting more young people involved in creative work result in more attendees for the arts? As I suggested above, we need to tease out the potential differences between 'improving children's social capital', to use Tessa Jowell's term; and 'teaching for creativity' which may equip them with all sorts of thinking skills schools are ill-configured to deal with. Most fundamentally, to echo Fraser the programme proposes transformation within a system that is not willing or able to transform.

The emphasis within Creative Partnerships, as it has been implemented across the country, rather than in its initial policy inception, is on young people making and developing their own cultural practices, rather than being observers of cultural performances or simply being exposed to culture. By and large, programmes have sought to be grounded in local cultural contexts, offering site specific, young person led work. This has meant that the programme has been highly bespoke, and often highly localised. Quite apart from the obvious contradiction that this is centrally controlled, government mandated programme tasked with encouraging bespoke, culturally specific, bottom up developmental programmes, this has meant that the programme has not always provided the

[28] Ibid: p. 20.

consistent, large scale 'evidence' that ring fenced streams of government investment tend to require. Like many arts education programmes, Creative Partnerships has always been caught between delivering meaningful programmes that meet young peoples' needs, and being able to demonstrate statistical meaningful change.

Qualitative reporting from the Creative Partnerships programme[29] confirms what I have seen through my own involvement in Creative Partnerships projects, which is that supporting young people's creativity will indeed improve their life chances and see them happier; it may even improve their test scores and see them visit the gallery more often. This is a belief shared across a vast number of dedicated teachers, artist educators and culture workers but one that has only had intermittent support from with the major government departments, particularly the Department of Education and Skills. The recent publication of a dedicated Ofsted inspection of Creative Partnerships gives important official sanction to schools working with creative practitioners to develop children's creativity but its commentary is not universally positive, and follows from another summer where GCSE and A level results publication were accompanied by calls for a return to more formal literacy and numeracy, and grammar.

What the programme has not been able to test is what would happen if the creative approaches associated with particular projects and interventions were adopted more generally within the school or within the education system. As we shall see, the most ambitious work and the most significant impact has tended to happen outside the confines of the formal school day. It has thrived there, but has also been contained there. These are the on the ground challenges felt by schools and cultural organisations that put great store by creativity but don't find themselves in an easy place, governed as they are by the cautionary pressures of a standardized education system, and an increasingly output driven cultural

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[29] See Creative Partnerships, *First Findings*; Creative Partnerships Birmingham, *Blue Is Calm: Red Makes Me Feel Alive*.

sector, haunted by the questions, ‘did it make them cleverer?’, ‘are there more bums on seats?’

One of the ways the CP programme in Birmingham tried to deal with this is to attempt to question what we mean by culture, creativity and arts practice and to create conditions whereby young people, artists and teachers can actively take part in such a debate. There has been a focus since the beginning of the programme on developing a risk taking culture: supporting teachers to take more risks in their approach to learning turned out to be one of the core critical features of Creative Partnerships. Tracing the development of the Creative Partnerships Birmingham work, from initial one-off arts education interventions, to current projects that seek to work across the whole school curriculum and involve many different art forms and art form practitioners, offers some interesting perspective and critique of the contradictions I mapped out above.

There are many examples I could discuss to exemplify the work of the programme. In the last four years CP Birmingham have delivered more than 400 projects, working across all art forms and covering every curriculum area. In order to maintain some sense of coherence within this mass of work I’m going to focus on the use and development of contemporary visual arts practice by two clusters of schools in the programme. Through this one can see the movement from an interesting, but relatively conventional, approach to gallery education, to a current project, *Feed Me!*, that has built up a community of practitioners, artists, teachers and young people, as part of a year-long live arts intervention to create a shared space of community identity across five very different schools. As I discuss these examples I am also tracing a shift in approach to creative learning and arts education. This too has been a challenging and sometimes terrifying journey for all those working for Creative Partnerships in Birmingham.

The projects below are part of a long-term partnership between the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham and four mainstream and one special secondary schools in the Handsworth, Aston, Ladywood part of Birmingham.[30] All of these schools were very concerned to expand the range and quality of creative and cultural work their pupils were offered at school; they were also interested in exploring how young people in their schools accessed (or didn't) cultural activity in Birmingham. As part of this work, they opted to develop a relationship with Ikon, as the most significant contemporary art space in the city. Ikon were interested in developing their existing educational programme, and in particular wanted to develop relationships with secondary schools, which they generally found to be more difficult to reach due, they felt, to the restrictions of curriculum organisation.

The first phase of work with the schools focused around working with two contemporary artists on a Wallpaper project. The artists had commissioned a series of interactive wallpapers, diary pages that could be written on, musical scores, a dot-to-dot wallpaper. The gallery started discussions with each school to create a bespoke response to the wallpaer and identify a subject area and year group that would work with artists to create this response and install it in the school space. [See Figure 1]. To launch the project the Ikon installed the wallpaper on its own walls and invited each school to bring pupils, parents and teachers to a opening, where they were invited to create their own response to the papers. There was a great turn out to the launch day, including parents and teachers who had rarely been involved in creative work in school. The installations in school were also very effective, creating some fascinating cross-curricula work (for example with music, maths and visual arts), new relationships with non arts subject tutors and the schools felt the beginnings of a special

[30] The schools are George Dixon International School; Handsworth Boys Grammar School; Handsworth Wood Girls School; Holte Visual and Performing Arts College; Mayfield Special School. I would like to thank all five schools for their contribution and involvement in the programme and offer particular thanks to the teacher coordinators in each school, without whom these projects could not have taken place.

relationship with the Ikon after being invited into their space. We were very pleased with it then.

On the other hand, it did not have any significant impact on thinking about teaching and learning in the schools, nor did it alter the practice of the Gallery significantly; it was an education 'one-off' that had no particular relationship to the mainstream programme at Ikon. More fundamentally, it offered no significant creative choice or input for young people, or their teachers and little opportunity for developing creative thinking or independent learning. It was a lovely enrichment activity, but not a lot more and was premised on the model that we/the Ikon had a lovely idea (and knew all about art) and it was our job to show the schools and young people how nice it was. At its core it was arts as social medicine, rather than a collaborative or partnership process.

The building of trust, however, was very important. In the next phase of work with the school, we saw a substantial deepening of the relationships between schools and the gallery, particularly in terms of partnerships with teachers. A strand of work was developed with the integrated dance company Corali, who were bringing their work *The Shed Show* to the Ikon. [Figure 2: The Shed Show] Corali, for the first time as a company, agreed to spend time in residence in one of the schools, developing work with pupils and teachers across the five schools, and running a series of professional development sessions with groups of teachers. They rehearsed and then performed in the school, but also developed a series of creative literacy projects, developing a series of Fairytale projects using cross art form approaches to literacy, including movement, sound and other non-verbal modes of engagement. This allowed, then, the beginning of a dialogue about form and content of the creative collaboration, that drew on the ideas of young people, teachers and artists. It was still, though, very much initiated by the ideas of the creative professionals and as very much seen as a special project, outside the boundaries of normal school

The next phase of work, which took place in the second year of the collaboration, became the most significant piece of work between Ikon and the five schools. It is notable that it was able to flourish outside the bounds of the formal school day, even though the creative outputs of the young people were used as part of their GCSE and GNVQ work. . The partnership had grown steadily over 18 months, and the relationship between teachers, young people, gallery and artists were at a stage where they were robust enough to support experimentation and risk taking. Growing knowledge and sympathy for each others' practice created an appropriate context for imaginative work. The Ikon, also, had moved to a place where it was prepared to integrate its education practice with its mainstream contemporary art programme. In the summer 2003 Ikon started discussions with artist George Shaw, whose work was to show in the gallery in the Autumn, and the five schools to explore the possibility of developing a collaborative project. George proposed the formation of a nightschool, which young people and teachers would be invited to join, to create pieces of work toward an exhibition, called 'Here, There and Everywhere' that would show in the Ikon but also tour all five schools. Pupils and teachers were invited to view with George his show, 'What I Did Last Summer'. George's time commitments meant that he was not going to be able to deliver all the sessions himself so artist Carolyn Morton was invited to join the project as co-facilitator.

George and Carolyn delivered a series of sessions across three school sites, to mixed and integrated groups of pupils from the five schools. Teachers were invited to sign up for the nightschool as adult learners, creating their own pieces of work, rather than as teaching staff (a role they valued even as it was difficult to maintain). The premise of the project was for the participants to use their own backgrounds to explore the concept of home, through photography, three-dimensional work, painting and drawing. Though the schools are in relatively close geographical proximity to one another, they are each extraordinarily diverse and different from one another. The idea of drawing together cross school groups and then exhibiting the work of all the students and teachers in

each school was, to quote George Shaw 'to allow each artist to tell the story of their own idea of home to someone whose ideas were completely different'[31].

As the project developed, participant enthusiasm led to a request for the number of sessions to be extended. At this point the idea of creating a catalogue came up, and it was suggested that the students should be brought together to debate and select works for the exhibition was mooted. Students and teachers were invited to spend a day at Ikon to present, critique and select works for the show. Andrew Tims from Ikon recorded and then transcribed the discussion on the day. This provided a critical commentary on the art works that took the project in a new and exciting direction. It also provided a rich seam of data from young people about the nature of the creative work taking place. The show was put together and the catalogue designed through continued partnership with the students (they, for example chose the pocket sized form, so as to fit in a pocket – they didn't want to be 'seen' to be carrying art books!). When the show opened at the Ikon the Events room was barely large enough to hold the students, teachers, parents, siblings and general gallery visitors who turned up. This is itself testament to the importance accorded culturally valued acts of creativity, especially where these have been led by young people's ideas.

So what precisely was the nature of the creative practice developed as part of this project. How did it relate to the features of creative thinking that I noted earlier, as I would argue this project did? Why was it valuable to young people and their schools? We could view this under the following headings.

There are no right answers

Both artists involved in the project, like many practicing artists, work with a pedagogical approach that values open-ended inquiry. They do not withhold support, guidance or the passing on of technical insight but they do not offer their

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[31] 'Here, There and Everywhere' catalogue, Ikon Gallery/Creative Partnerships, 2003.

own form of practice as the ‘right’ answer to an artistic question. As one young person commented, ‘ they gave me ideas when I was stuck, but left me to do what I felt was right’.[32] Carolyn Morton commented on how unfamiliar this was for some pupils, and how cautious they were initially in making choices that set them apart from their peers. What is significant is that for the artists involved this related to how they develop their own creative practice, so young people are encouraged along a shared journey of exploration. As George Shaw said, ‘It was refreshing to be involved in a project that allowed and supported the very real processes we all know lead to original creativity’

We are all learners here

Pupils had the opportunity to shape the form and content of their learning and their practice throughout the project. The role of teachers within the project, and the role of the artist-educators, is quite different from the dominant pedagogical mode in the classroom. Though teachers sometimes had to step into support mode, they all developed their own creative works as part of the project, many of them deliberately exploring the absence of space for creation in their daily teaching role.

Space for reflection

The development of a non-judgemental space, in both the workshops and within the gallery, where students were encouraged to reflect on how far they had got with a particular approach and to value and accept peer review. Students were encouraged to work outside their fixed school groups and the space they were invited into was culturally valued and offered opportunities (in terms of materials, support and mentoring) qualitatively different from those typically offered in school.

The Raising of Expectations

[32] All comments from artists, pupils and teachers are taken from project evaluation undertaken by Andrew Tims, Education Coordinator for Ikon, held at the Creative Partnerships Birmingham office.

All participants made extensive comment on the significance of working with 'real artists' whose work is accorded a cultural significance. To work with the knowledge that their work would eventually also be seen in a culturally valued space like a gallery dramatically raised the stakes for young people and teachers. As one headteacher said, 'It was wonderful to see pupil's and staff's work displayed in a "real gallery". The raising of expectations in school by the whole project has been amazing.' The building of a partnership between school setting and gallery helped to create the right context for the production of creative works through communication and debate; galleries, schools and young people all benefitted from this dialogue.

Creating Cultural Value

If we look at individual pieces of work we can see in them a quality of creative engagement that helps to explain why we might prize creativity as a critical part of young people's learning. Really powerful imaginative work reflects on the forces that shape the world as we currently understand it and speculates on how this might be changed.

[Figure 3 – Marina]

In Marina's piece, an almost empty wire house is precariously fashioned, with a bright yellow door. Her commentary moves rapidly to denounce the contemporary moment of TV makeovers and style as offered by Ikea as a selling out of identity and imagination. She asks simply, 'its like why don't you just make your own art?'

[figure 4, Richard]

In Richard's piece, 'Grass and Dirt', memory and creative response come together in a visual and spoken dialogue about the significance of a person, his grandfather, and the space of a local park. The work articulates a clear complaint about the lack of agency of local (young) people in shaping their

community. We can see in the piece creativity connected to cultural location and identity and as such it makes a powerful social commentary.

Both of these pieces of work show young people making and shaping cultural value in forms that are chosen by them and about issues that are meaningful to their experiences and contexts. Each of the creative responses could be analysed in straightforwardly artistic terms – they are highly original, well executed, technically interesting approaches to the problem posed. The pieces and their accompanying commentary can also be analysed in strictly educational terms; the students produced a higher quality art output, they demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of critical language to debate their artistic output and show eloquence and confidence in putting forward their views in a public arena.

All of these things are important but unless we also acknowledge the ways in which this creative work shows young people debating cultural values then we miss the most exciting thing about the work. As John Holden argues, by understanding the full range of values involved in cultural work and creative practice, we move toward understanding culture as an integral and essential part of civil society, not simply as an a priori 'good thing' nor as the happy deliverer of other agendas.[33] As one of the teachers involved in the project commented,

> The opportunities offered these young people have been immense. But the true investment comes not from them as members of a school group but as citizens who understand the role of arts in life.

This, then, offers a powerful and hopeful example of how significant creativity and cultural engagement is for young people, their schools and communities. The role of creative organisations and artists in facilitating this dialogue is crucial given that these are the spaces our culture supports for the fostering and valuing of such open ended, speculative, imaginative exploration. As George Shaw

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[33] See John Holden, Creating Cultural Value.

commented, ‘ [the show] gave the pupils work a focus and a maturity that their ideas, thinking and commitment deserved’

In this sense, one might say, the programme is and has been working.

But for many schools involved in developing work such as this, within and outside schemes like Creative Partnerships, there is still concern whether this kind of creative pedagogy (and we should be clear it is pedagogy, not simply playing around) will hold up to close (educational) inspection. Schools involved in work like that outlined above can point to and demonstrate the quality of creative work young people are producing. They may, as some of the Creative Partnerships schools now can, be able also to show that their Key Stage 1 and 2 SATS results have gone up and that reading, writing and numeracy will improve across the board. These shifts are, though, likely to be part of a much slower development of the way a whole school works, engages with its community and cultural setting, and is rarely attributable to one element alone. However, in the short term, politicians and parents are rarely prepared for wait for ‘results’ to be delivered. While the projects described are all creditable arts interventions, with the last one producing the most significant outcomes for young people, they are also labour intensive and don’t meet the numbers targets of the policy framework very effectively.

Furthermore, supporting young people’s creativity from early years through to adulthood may produce results that schools and parents are much less prepared to negotiate. If young people are supported to be the more independent learners government and industry say they require then they are likely also to develop greater capacity to question, challenge, debate and dissent – as one can see in Richard’s measured but passionate critique of the paucity of leisure provision in his part of town. These are all seen as highly desirable qualities in terms of developing creativity and they are qualities much sought after in the cultural sector. We should perhaps take a moment to think whether schools and

educational systems more broadly are currently well configured to deal with this kind of dynamic awkwardness. It is important and salutary to note, that the shared learning environment fostered in the project above, was only possible in a 'nightschool', where the relationship between teacher, pupil and artist was fundamentally different from that within the regular school day.

At the current time supporting innovative partnerships with creative practitioners schools does not encounter absolute resistance; indeed in Birmingham there is extensive support from the very top of the education authority and a cultural sector well used to working with schools and providing the kind of 'evidence of learning' they require. However, even the most confidently creative schools still have to keep their eyes on the league table ball. It takes a courageous headteacher to hold onto creativity for young people in the face of SATS and GCSE results that do not seem to be moving in the right direction. The most difficult problem remains that we have yet to be completely convinced that creativity, in itself, is a worthwhile pursuit. I am reminded of this by a last example drawn from the project with George Shaw. Tim, a science teacher involved in the project, offered a piece of work and the funniest of all the commentaries for the catalogue.

[Figure 5: Stolen Sky]
His image is a rather amazing composite of photographs of the Handsworth area. He explains that he didn't feel that he could 'do' art, so instead stole photographs from the female students in the group and used them to create his image. As he says, 'this was funny cos I'm a teacher so I'm not supposed to nick things.'
His own amusement at his theft of photos from some of the girls in the project in order to make his piece belies an obvious sense of anxiety at his own creative capacity.

> I enjoyed this but I don't think I could do it all the time. I don't think I am imaginative enough … I was never really any good at art'.[34]

The work created stands in direct contradiction to this statement and we could elaborate on the critique of systems of learning that such a commentary offers. The sobering fact is that in a creative project such as this one, within a relatively amenable context for the promotion of creativity for young people and their teachers, this teacher still feels it is likely that he will not be creative enough. The real problem with projects like this, and more broadly arts education at the current time, is that it is never allowed to or invited to become truly transformational (in Fraser's terms). If we look at one more example, we can be both more honest about the significant, but limited, impact programmes like CP can have, and suggest what arts and cultural organisations might do about this.

The last project I want to discuss is called *Feed Me!* It takes this process of collaboration a step further, putting the genesis of cultural space and creative work firmly into the hands of young people, artists and their communities. *Feed Me* is a year-long intervention, which the schools and Creative Partnerships team hope will last for many years more. The project has stepped outside the bounds of school altogether to create a growing space for five schools, where an alternative, fantastical, celebratory Feast has been grown, planned, cooked and shared by young people, artists, their teachers and their parents.

The space is an allotment – a rented, communal growing space within the city. Through discussion of the growing, making, eating and sharing of food the schools and artist practitioners have found a language and a cultural space in which to talk about the shaping of identity, the making of cultural value, social health and wealth. In coming together to work with Creative Partnerships the schools were supported by the CP team to devise a brief, advertise for creative partners and take a role as active commissioners of their creative learning

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[34] *Here, There and Everywhere* catalogue: p. 22.

programme. From the very beginning the schools and their young people have been engaged in building the ideas, then selecting the project partner who could bring in the required divergent thinking and creative risk – in this case Fierce Festival – a live arts organisation that runs an annual festival in the city, which is taking on this work as part of their wider artistic ambition to engage citizens of Birmingham in a journey of creative discovery through making art in unconventional spaces across the city. In doing this, the schools, all whom have had extensive involvement in working with cultural sector practitioners in the past, signed up to an open ended journey about what this space might become as a shared endeavour. They actively, though fearfully, signed up to taking a risk.

A gardener-artist has worked with young people, their parents and teachers, and a range of artists across many art forms to develop a thriving organic plot, with a gallery onsite (in the former shed) and a raft of activities designed to link the growing space with the different school sites. The work has explored stories, histories, heritage as well as science, ecology, economics, maths and sustainable development. Most fundamentally the schools and artists come to this project as a process of community building and place making. Children are now commissioning the individual artists who will help to build the project, and teachers are working in partnership with artists to integrate all of this work into the whole school curriculum.

Rather than telling artists that they want an art project that 'fits into' their literacy strategy – where art is forced into delivering other agendas, here teachers have been exploring how their literacy work might emanate from the developing Feed Me space, so that other agendas are met but not in an instrumental way.
The story of the project has grown much larger than any of the partners intended at the outset – the schools are determined that the journey from their schools should be one of wonder and curiosity, so many of the installations and activities associated with Feed Me appear on the way from school to allotment [See Figure

7] As they do this they are transforming the wider neighbourhood that these schools are part of, creating a belonging that none of them felt previously. This October, saw the produce and the celebration produced as a community Feast, but it's wider outcomes include stories, ceramics, textile work, dying, visual arts, digital animation, sound pieces and music, dance pieces – all which have been connected to the ongoing construction of a space and a community.

In doing this the schools are taking huge risks in how they deliver their education, this is not normal work for the primary literacy strategy; they are formulating their own, shared creative learning journey. What young people are doing is, as I argued at the beginning, developing the tools to conceptualise how the world could be different and the inner confidence and motivation to make it happen. The allotment has been created as a space for experimentation, and young people have done just this, in variously positive and negative ways, with results that have sometimes caused all sorts of inconveniences to the schools involved. In no way has this been an easy ride, nor has been richly satisfying work at all times. The anodyne evaluations that are produced to serve the needs of funding bodies that want straightforward outputs, 'x number of pupils complete y number of activities', cannot adequately tell the story of a difficult, creative learning journey. What the project did offer was a space where it is OK to try, test and fail (with some increasing confidence). In the terms that I have been exploring in this essay, this extended partnership and project, attempts to transform the system of education they work within, most fundamentally by creating a shared creative learning space, rather than just enrich the established modes of operation.

Creative projects such these are all too rare and many schools are still a too scared to follow a path (even a path to an allotment) where the outcomes are as yet unknown. The schools involved here often want to retreat back to what they know, and mitigate all the risk, and in fact one has been lost to the project along with way. What we can see here is that the support and brokerage role offered by Creative Partnerships is significant not because it sorts all the logistics – the

schools and artists organisations are more than skilled enough to do that themselves – but because it acts as permission giver, hand holder, confidence booster so that schools and arts organisations have the courage to embark at all on the journey. In a culture of educational accountability that remains suspicious of creative, exploratory work it is likely that they are correct to be cautious. Without a nuanced language to describe creative work as an intrinsic part of the making and shaping of cultural values – what it means to be, think, live and work in our society – then we risk that creativity and the rich and complex partnerships that we see making such a difference will find only a contingent place in the culture of our schools.

These contingent projects, located somewhere on the margins of the core school day, do seem to be able to support what George Shaw called, 'the very real processes we all know lead to original creativity'. They are also characterised by an ethics of collaboration that moves us considerably beyond an instrumental understanding of the arts, and beyond being an government investment in 'the personal social capital' to quote Jowell again, of disenfranchised young people. They don't, however, directly result in better SATs scores or more arts attenders, despite the efforts of the policy framework to suggest that they should. It seems that perhaps the most important lesson to be learnt from the ongoing work of Creative Partnerships is that the cultural sector and the education sector should risk admitting that. Projects aren't a failure because of this, it is simply not what they set out to do. Then we might be able to entertain the thought that it is important that young people are encouraged to be creative, and that the shaping of cultural value should be a core part of school. To allow artists and cultural organisations to work together with an ethics of collaboration toward this idea would, however, require a much more fundamental transformation of both education and the cultural sector. For a start, as the young people in one project suggested, it might require blowing up the school. [See Figure 7]

Coda: *Walking with Your Eyes Closed*

To close, I would like to offer some reflections on a piece of Creative Partnerships work produced by Stan's Cafe, a live theatre company based in Birmingham. Stan's Cafe were tasked to develop a day-long experience that would explore the role of risk-taking in creative learning for teachers from the 26 schools working as part of this initiative. They were also asked to make this exploration a chance for teachers to explore Birmingham city centre as a site of creative engagement. Their response was a Risk Day, where teachers working in pairs were given a series of choices that guided their navigation around and through Birmingham city centre, collecting observations and encounters, to an end point in Digbeth at the Chuck Works (Stan's Cafe's base) and then the Custard Factory, where the Creative Partnerships office is located. It was a walking tour without a definite map, where the journey to the end point could vary dramatically depending on the choices and responses of the participants.

Stan's Cafe had devised a series of encounters with aspects of Birmingham, some familiar and some arcane. So participants were directed to the Waterstones bookshop that overlooks the new Bull Ring area and told to read a middle section of a novel by Birmingham novelist Jim Crace that describes the Bull Ring market. Another instruction was to listen to a track from the Streets album that describes life in the high rise blocks in Small Heath. Still another asked participants to put on a blindfold and feel their way across the bridge over the A38. It is this image that ties together much of what I am trying to suggest in this piece. Blindfold, the teachers had to feel their way across the bridge accompanied by the sound of that most familiar of Birmingham elements, the rush and roar of the traffic.

In embarking on this day teachers had to take a risk to transform how they thought about their city, how they might engage their pupils, their schools: they

had to think about how they might travel without knowing where they are going. The Risk Day was a tentative pilot project, which became one of the most significant interventions across the whole programme, repeated, with many creative variations, by different groups of teachers and artists across the whole CP programme. It became this important because it started a creative dialogue about the transformation of learning. At the end of the Risk Day, Stan's Cafe presented a performance text based on the observations collected by the teacher navigators. This essay will close with this poem, as a lighthearted but also profound engagement with the processes of creative, open-ended learning.

THE ZONE OF THE UNKNOWN

A-Z, 1 to 15. Into the zone. Joining up the pages
Past the station, down the ramp, under the Rotunda, opposite HMV, the sound of music...
Is it the sound of the streets? Can't make him out, he's wearing a top with the hood up, making the sounds, saying the sounds of the city.
A to Z, 1 to 15 . Into the unknown
Standing near the axis of it all, feet scraping, traffic humming, the song of the fanbelt
Seeing the sides of buildings not seen before, the invisible city... but for the people
But for the people who make it, who make it into the city everyday, who make it into Birmingham everyday.
The couple on their way to the hills, clandestine, hand in hand, the city below, only they know.
The overweight, overheated lorry driver. Too many breakfasts in Mr Egg.
The lads leaving it behind, for hills and lakes and boats.
The toothbrush salesman on his way to Redditch, wishing it was him, not Jim, at the ICC for the dental hygienists' convention
A to Z, 1 to 15 . Into the new, new old city.
Where the corrugated canal ripples past cement work chimney stack,

Merlin and Fastblast, Latif and Rose, names to conjure, beds to guitars, cars to conservatories.
Where the jet train roars and cars lie crushed and the streets are paved with...
But there's beauty... in the walls that grow trees and sprout verse.
In the crisp packets waltzing in the wind
In the barbed wire sculpture on Banbury Street.
A to Z, 1 to 15. Linking the lines
Into the dark, don't turn back,
There are no dead ends. Head for the light, follow the stars,
Look for the sparks...

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