PUPIL AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATURE OF ARTIST PEDAGOGIES AND THEIR POTENTIAL IMPACT ON SCHOOL CHANGE

Pamela Burnard and Mandy Maddock

BACKGROUND: ON CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The Robinson Report, *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (NACCCE, 1999[1]) and its key recommendations served as a 'call to arms' to school leaders, educational researchers, policy makers and practitioners. Key recommendations from this report were that: (a) The importance of creative and cultural education should be explicitly recognized and provided for in schools' policies for the whole curriculum and in Government policy; (b) Teachers and other professionals should be trained to use methods and materials that facilitate the development of young people's creative abilities & cultural understanding and (c) There should be partnerships between schools and outside agencies to provide the kinds of creative and cultural education that young people need and deserve.

The six years since the publication of the Robinson Report have seen a proliferation of funded projects in the educational arena. These include projects involving teachers, professional artists and young people working in participatory arts activities and in cross-disciplinary projects. One of the main aims of these creative partnership projects is to "provide school children across England with the opportunity to develop creativity in learning and to take part in cultural activities of the highest quality" (Creative Partnerships, 2005a, para.1[2]).

Projects of this sort have been a regular feature in a mixed comprehensive community college in the county of West Sussex which provides for the learning of some 1100 pupils between the ages of 12 and 18 years. The school serves a community in the 20th most deprived LEA in England. It was placed in "special measures" in 2002. A new and highly experienced head teacher was appointed at the end of the academic year 2001/2. This also coincided with recognition of the school by the government as having specialist status in the performing arts. A central strand in raising standards was the need to develop genuine creative activity which engaged pupils at their own level in purposeful and sustained learning.

---

[1] National Advisory Committee On Creative And Cultural Education (NACCCE) (1999). *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education.* London: Department for Education and Employment
[2] Creative Partnerships (2005a) Creative Partnership Website. Retrieved Feb 29 2005 from http://www.creative-partnerships.com/aboutcp.

In one such project, the school employed a composer and several professional performers to facilitate an intensive series of workshops to work with particular groups of young people, including some from feeder primary and secondary schools, selected for their interest in musical composition. The creative partnership ran over an 18 month period (2005-2006) and culminated in a combined performance of original student compositions in a Cathedral. At the conclusion of this artist-led project questions arise pertaining to the subtle ways that artist pedagogies operate, how pupils and teachers view (and even define) visiting artists pedagogic practices, the perceived influence of artist pedagogies on learners and on raising standards, and teachers' professional development in relation to these kinds of pedagogical encounters.

PURPOSE

This small-scale post hoc scoping study aimed to explore the pupil and teacher views on the ways in which the visiting artists worked, the perceived value of these pedagogical encounters, and how the outcomes might relate to (and potentially enable a new view of) school change.

The project included a professional development session which was led by the university researchers. The aims were to facilitate creative exchange of ideas across disciplines outside the Performing Arts Faculty and to develop a greater understanding of the ways in which these kinds of pedagogies could be developed effectively within the mainstream provision of the school curriculum.

With this in mind we did not begin with an operational definition of artists' pedagogy but rather we wanted to invoke the perceptions of those involved to end with inductively derived findings. From here, we aimed to theorise how artists' approaches to pedagogy may function in educational contexts.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The research began in March 2007. Data were obtained from individual, paired and focus group interviews with pupils, teachers and artists lasting between 30-60 minutes each. A total of 43 participants were interviewed. These included 30 pupils and 13 adults from the organizing school's leadership team, performing arts and cross-discipline teachers, teacher assistants, along with a sample of participants from two feeder schools. A flexible interview protocol was developed in order to maximize the opportunity for us to learn from respondent generated perceptions and understandings of the salient aspects of artist pedagogy which improved learning.

During the interviews, the participants were asked exploratory questions regarding their beliefs about learning, the demands of the project work, the ways the artists worked, how they engaged with the project and what they felt they gained from the opportunities. We also raised questions about the ways in which they responded to working with professional artists, and to the perceived impact of specific approaches of this kind. During the interviews, participants had the opportunity to review a selection of photos taken at different stages and phases of the project. These acted as stimuli for reflective recalls.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed *verbatim*. The transcriptions were scrutinized and their content subjected to a systematic textual analysis, with emergent themes and like concepts being grouped and categorized and then expanded to more general themes across cases. This involved careful and repeated reading of each interview. It was followed by attempts to discover emergent themes and sort practices into a number of appropriate categories.

KEY FINDINGS

A meta-theme and several themes emerged from this study.

Doing Things Differently
Pupils and teachers saw the artists as 'visiting experts' where doing things differently, the meta theme emerging from the data, was seen as *how* artists operate. Pupils especially emphasised that the artists do things differently from the ways of working that they encounter with their teachers. The difference consists of a range of unexpectedly diverse pedagogies, or ingredients, which are discussed under the thematic headings below. As with most pedagogies, the artists' pedagogies operated in subtle ways. The pedagogies were based on strongly held beliefs and values that were inextricably tied up with a particular stance on learning and orientation towards learners; a strong task/activity-based orientation; and a position as role models and agent provocateurs in the context of working in and using sites outside of the school for learning (e.g. in churches, cathedrals and other historical sites) with the exhilaration of unconventional procedures.

> ### (i) Framing spaces for learning in particular ways
> - Specific out-of-school sites were chosen which offered new sensory and impressionistic experiences to inspire creative processes and products.
> - 'Real world' environments gave authenticity to the experience of composing.
> - Artists used locations other than the school in ways which supported the building of a learning community and render new learner identities in the context of the experiences, interests and pre-existing knowledge base of the pupils.

(ii) Spaces for framing new relationships: building learning communities

- Artists offered the authenticity of 'real world' experience and skilled dialogue.
- Artists created adaptive spaces for learning rather than setting routines and manoeuvres.
- Artists modelled motivation, enjoyment, commitment experimental approaches and apprenticeship for learners.
- Learning relations were characterised by flexibility and openness where:
  - o Pedagogic practices were exploratory rather than presentational in style
  - o Questioning exchanges were more dialogic than didactic
  - o Forms of feedback were more evaluative than corrective
  - o Learning relations were underpinned by equality, truthfulness, and trust.

(iii) Spaces for Empowerment: a focus on the emotional dimension of learning

- Acknowledgement of and respect for pupils' needs in the emotional dimension of learning.
- Pupils felt valued and respected. They felt that their self-esteem, self-respect, confidence and personal agency were increased through their contact with artists.
- Risk, enjoyment, and challenge were key features experienced by artists and pupils alike.
- Learners had ultimate responsibility for decisions about their composition.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated that artists' pedagogies contribute to advancing pupil learning and can help pupils to regain confidence in their learning capacity (in this case, as composers). The visiting artists were seen as professionals with expert knowledge who came into the school in a joint quest for opening new ways of thinking (about composing), for improving standards (of composing), and of building new understanding of creativity. The artists offered new starting points, new learning relationships, new ways of being a learner and of learning. There was evidence that artist pedagogies contributed to perceived changes in pupils, (e.g. giving pupils permission to see themselves differently, to work as composers, to share authentic experiences) and for teachers (to rekindle a love of the subject and awareness of their own creativity).

This study has also demonstrated that teachers can be helped to reconnect with their own creativity. They will, however, need continued support, time and space for reflecting on their own pedagogy, to engage with other ways of working, and to look again at their assessment of pupils' capabilities.

Reflecting on pedagogical encounters can play an important role in enabling to help build a successful learning community and to establish new learning identities within it.

Outcomes of the project

Burnard, P. & Maddock, M. (2007) Artist pedagogy and school change: An exploratory study of a regenerating community college. Paper presented at BERA Annual Conference, Institute of London, University of London, 5-8 September, 2007.

Burnard, P. & Maddock, M. (2007) Pupil and teacher perceptions of the nature of artist pedagogy and its impact on school change: School report. Sent 31 October, 2007

Burnard, P. & Maddock, M. (in draft) Doing things differently: pupil and teacher perceptions of artists' ways of working. *British Journal of Educational Research* To be completed/submitted Dec/Jan 2008.

Burnard, P. (2008) 'Creativity, learning discourses and practice' Paper at American Educational Research Association (AERA), Division C: Learning and instruction, New York, March, 2008.

Burnard, P. & White, J. (in review) Rebalancing pedagogy: performativity, creativity and professionalism in British and Australian education. *British Educational Research Journal* (Special Issue on 'Creativity' sent Sept 2007). Outcome expected March, 2008.

Craft, A., Cremin, T., Burnard, P. & Chappell, K. (2007) Teacher stance in creative learning. *Thinking Skills and Creativity,* 2(1), 136-147.

PLACE Academic Group Research Seminar One-day Symposium/Conference on 'Creative learning practices, pedagogies and assessment' is planned (drawing on the remaining funds from the RD contribution) planned Michaelmas Term 2008.