Reintroducing creativity: Day 10 at Hackleton School

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the first year of a fortnightly ‘creative arts’ morning, instituted by a primary school to bring more balance into the curriculum, which the staff saw as dominated by National Curriculum, and especially literacy and numeracy requirements. Through increasing and unremitting demands, creativity and the arts had become suppressed in the school. The initiative was evaluated using qualitative research methods involving observation, discussion and study of documents. It was found that there were significant educational benefits in the creative arts mornings, especially in the areas of generating positive emotions, the cultivation of social relationships among both staff and children, the development of pupil skills and creativity, and heightened teacher morale. The initial aims were all achieved in part, though some more fully than others. The article concludes with a discussion of possible longer-term aims and the principles on which they might be based.

KEY WORDS

creativity; arts education; positive emotions; relationships; teacher morale.
INTRODUCTION: DAY 10

To provide the best quality education possible, giving experience of excellence, in a happy, caring environment. (School Aim)

It was in the spirit of this aim that the teachers of Hackleton School in Northamptonshire instituted a ‘creative arts’ morning, to be held on every other Friday during the school year 2000–1 (‘Day 10’). These activities are deemed by the staff to be part of a ‘quality education’, and are not well served by the National Curriculum (Robinson, 1993). The specific aims, according to the staff, were to:

1. return high status to the arts within the school curriculum;
2. redress the curriculum balance with regard to the domination of literacy and numeracy;
3. develop creativity and thinking skills;
4. develop children’s fine motor skills;
5. develop collaborative learning across children of all year groups;
6. enjoy the arts.

The head and staff therefore instituted a new session into the fortnightly timetable, whereby every other Friday morning the normal curriculum is abandoned in favour of the creative arts. Staff volunteer their own activities. The children are divided into mixed age groups of about 20–25 in number, and spend a whole morning on one activity, moving around each week from session to session, to drama and dance (a play based on the story of St George and the Dragon), mask-making, weaving, marbling, bubble painting, collage, music and composition, percussion, rainforest painting – the menu for this particular year.

The idea of a Day 10 is not new. It was first used by secondary schools in the 1970s to provide some variety in the rigid timetable (see, for example, Fletcher et al., 1985). It is an interesting commentary on recent developments that it should now reappear in a primary school. It might be seen as an attempt to recapture some of the elements of child-centred and discovery learning (Sugrue, 1997), underwritten by constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978), so vilified and squeezed by governments since the late 1980s (Campbell, 1993; Woods et al., 1997; Triggs and Pollard, 1998). It is also a form of adaptation to the escalation of pressures on teachers and their time, the almost exclusive focus on measurable performance, and the downgrading of the artistic and affective side of teaching and learning which has characterized government policy since the late 1980s (Apple, 1986; Hargreaves, 1994; Ball, 1998). Further, it offers an opportunity for teachers to regenerate their own sense of professionalism (Woods and Jeffrey, 1996; Osborn et al., 2000).
The scheme has been running for a year. How has it worked? Have the aims been met? To tackle these questions, qualitative methods were employed in the attempt to discover reactions, understand experiences, and to uncover some of the rich detail of the interaction (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). A democratic model of research was adopted wherein the perspectives of all involved were sought, and conclusions fed back into the school’s policymaking framework (MacDonald, 1975; Walker, 1989). The following account draws on talks with the head, Rob Breeze, members of staff, children, and parent-governors; observations by Peter of three sessions, and by Jennifer of one session, at the end of the summer term; and written evaluations by Class 6 children and the teachers.

The school is a rural primary catering for some 200 pupils from 4 plus to 11 years of age. There are eight full-time teachers and three teaching assistants. It is in a mainly, though not exclusively, middle-class area, and there are no children currently eligible for free school meals. Hackleton has performed consistently well in SATs in recent years at both Key Stages 1 and 2, and received a good report from OFSTED inspectors in 1999. Teacher turnover and rates of unauthorized absence among the children are low.

**EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS**

*Positive emotions*

In the prevailing government discourse, the emotions receive low priority. In fact they came under attack in the assault on primary pedagogy in the early 1990s (Woods and Wenham, 1995). There had been too much ‘caring and not enough teaching’. But teaching and learning are inescapably emotional matters. Passion is a major component of the successful teacher’s repertoire. Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998: 228) talk of ‘pedagogical magic . . . that keeps the romance of teaching alive for great teachers’. Teachers are ‘emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy’ (Hargreaves, 1998: 835). However, recent years have been marked more by negative emotions of anger, anxiety, fear, self-doubt, uncertainty, distrust, shame and guilt which have impacted badly on teachers and teaching (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998; Troman and Woods, 2001). The same is true of pupils. Children have to be motivated to learn. The more passionate they feel about learning, the more the receptivity and level of awareness (Jeffrey and Woods, 1997). Day 10 revived the old feelings of ‘pedagogical magic’ and ‘love of learning’, inducing positive emotions like warmth, enjoyment, self-confidence and pride in one’s work.

Positive emotions flow from the general school climate, which has been
much aided by Day 10. The head, Rob Breeze, drew attention to the quality of artwork and display. Display is about the ‘ethos and culture that we wish to project to the wider world. And it just makes the environment nicer, which is also important for the children, and the staff who work in it.’

Display sets the tone, and it values the children’s work. It gives them pride in seeing their work on walls. It’s a great pleasure for children to see their work displayed. You see photographs of things we’ve done, and children will look at them thinking ‘Yes, there I am. I remember doing that’, even though they’ve been up for some time. It’s that kind of thing that reinforces their personal history within the school. It’s motivational, and good PR.

There is a very distinctive climate during these Friday sessions. Two parent governors who spent a whole morning observing wrote a letter of appreciation to the head in which they said: ‘We left with what can only be described as a warm glow.’ I felt this myself, late during my first morning, when, having visited most of the activities, I found myself standing in the main corridor studying the wall display. I could hear the percussionists, some background music from the play in the hall, a modulated babble of sound from the bubble painting room, and more distant noises from the masks and weaving activities. There was a sense of the whole school being engrossed in creative exercise. Similarly, when the activities finished and the children returned to their own classrooms carrying their products with them, there was a buzz of excitement as they shared their experiences. They were even heard talking about art, dance, music, etc. in the playground. These activities reassert that learning is not just a matter of painful toil, but can be fun. Enjoyment was evident at every turn.

I would hate children to leave this school and, when they look back, think what we did was Literacy and Numeracy. What I remember of my school days were the creative things . . . (Rob)

The most important thing is that they had fun. (Class 6 pupil of other pupils)

In my visits to the various classrooms, the children were all demonstrably enjoying themselves. They were doing something new to them, not the sort of thing they would do at home like drawing or crayoning. In this respect, there is something to be gained from the wealth of activities on offer. One child commented that he had broadened his knowledge: ‘I know more elements of art rather than just painting.’

Teachers create climates of anticipation, expectation and excitement (Woods and Jeffrey, 1996). Jennifer found this especially noticeable in the drama. There was an air of anticipation evident in the very early stages. This
was something ‘unusual’. What was going to happen? What were they going to be required to do? The teacher sets the scene, introducing them to the concept of ‘exaggerated movements’ through a brief activity involving receiving a present in a parcel delivered by the postman. The group stands watching, quietly observing while the teacher demonstrates receiving her present. The atmosphere is charged with anticipation. The children do not know what to expect. There is no routine here. One can almost hear the children asking, ‘What is going to happen here?’ Again, later, there is an air of excitement as they await the arrival of the ‘audience’ who are going to view the finished play.

The teachers also enjoy the activities, and their enjoyment is sometimes infectious, as the following fieldnotes demonstrate.

In the drama, Jo Roberts exudes confidence and all can see and feel that she is having a wonderful time as she prepares the ground. Then, ‘Mrs Roberts has to keep quiet now’. The activity becomes theirs, and they take over with equal enthusiasm. Every child, irrespective of age, feels that they are part of the team. There seemed a total lack of self-consciousness among them, no sense of inferiority, or ‘I am unable to perform this task’. In effect, the drama seemed to release their best efforts. For example, bigger boys in the drama performed some very graceful movements. They might have been more self-conscious in other situations. Equally, the way a small girl responded with her partner in the early stages of the drama gave her confidence to take part fully. She was told, ‘You were so good!’ Asked by Jennifer if she enjoyed doing this, her face broke into a big smile and she said, ‘Yes, I lubbit!’ Another little girl standing near her was smiling and nodding vigorously. At the end of proceedings, as the children changed into normal clothing and left the hall, there was an obvious feeling among the whole group, including the teacher, of satisfaction, and pride in their work.

In marbling, there is an atmosphere of feverish excitement in the room as the group complete their books. Helen shows me hers proudly. What is she going to do with it? She is going to take it home and write in it. Hannah wrote later that ‘marbling was good fun and an amazing effect. I was very proud with my books which I had made in the morning.’ As I leave the marbling group, the teacher remarks, ‘It’s lovely to see them all like this, enjoying themselves.’

Kieran enjoyed blow painting because ‘I felt proud of the effect I had made with the straw’.

Denise Brack, in her music and composition group, is exuberant as she sets the tone for the activity with a musical game of ‘head, eyes, shoulders, knees and toes’. All enter into the spirit, the little ones copying the older. Denise conveys the spirit, rouses enthusiasm
infectiously, gives the impression of enjoying it herself, lets them into a secret: ‘It’s my bit of exercise!’ Next, they sing the ‘Ant’ song. Denise does all the actions – ‘The little one stopped to shut the gate ... BANG! ... All together – BANG!’ She is just as enthused at the end of the session in her role as an Inuit seeking to impress his girl friend by catching a seal. She is really enjoying this herself, getting them to make the right noises, together, and to paddle, wave, etc. She fetches a drum to signal a beat. ‘It’s hard work this, isn’t it, all this paddling ...’ Now she is throwing a spear. Great fun. All enjoy it. Even the two big ones who opted out of the two lines of children sitting on the floor are brought in by being given drums to beat out the time.

When Denise’s own class returns, they sit on the floor to show and explain to each other what they have been doing. Jamie explains how, with Miss Lett, they had to get different coloured paper, dip it in paints ... Rhiana did a butterfly with Miss Heden, three girls explaining the intricacies of collage. Callum was in Miss Knight’s group. He made three butterflies then a lion ... made its mane and tail with a sponge because it looked like fun. He did it yellow, with brown on top, with little rollers, and then a border. All talk very enthusiastically about what they have been doing, some descriptively and at length. Similarly, Class R, asked by their teacher on their return if they had had a good time, replied with a loud and enthusiastic ‘Yeeaaah!’, nodding vigorously. (Fieldnotes)

As Denise noted above to her class, creativity requires hard work:

Nicola (Year 6, and leader of her group of four) is struggling to concentrate. ‘The little one stopped because he trod on some glue.’ This is quite a clever one, but she is not satisfied. She struggles on, staring ahead as she thinks, chewing her pencil, her hair all awry.

There is a carry-over beyond school. A parent told me how her little boy looked forward to ‘art day’. She doesn’t want her child dominated by SATs. She thinks they should do more of Day 10 work. Her child in Year 6 brings things home, and is very proud of what he has made, hangs them up around the house, and is talking about it for the rest of the week.

Given the enthusiasm, there was very little misbehaviour or inattention. Sessions were largely self-controlling. The children were captured from the very first introduction:

Vicky is showing them a video (on collage) as a stimulus. This worked, at least for one girl who told me she got her idea of a fish from somebody doing a bird on the video. The video shows animal skins, runs fingers over various coverings, transmits the very feel of things. The children sit rapt, taking it all in.
On rare occasions there were brief indications of over-enthusiasm, easily rectified by an encouraging comment from the teacher, such as ‘Don’t spoil it’ for both self and others. Also at key points, such as needing to bring the whole class to attention, or tidying-up junctures, some standard signals were made and quickly observed. Otherwise, throughout the activities, discipline is self-discipline, and a collective thing. I did not see any child who was bored, misbehaving, and very few who were not fully absorbed in their creative task for the whole of the session. When some did finish, they went on to help somebody else (for example, in the bubble painting). Given the nature of the activities there was plenty of opportunity for misbehaviour, and no shortage of all sorts of interesting ammunition. Most of these are messy activities, vulnerable to abuse. Only one, isolated incident came to my attention, and it was quickly and firmly dealt with.

Social relationships

Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them. (Vygotsky, 1978: 89)

At a macro level there are signs of a school and a community bonding. The mixed age groups added a longitudinal level to the existing horizontal one. Rob thought that ‘There were benefits not just inside the school, but in the playground, and I’m sure outside the school as well.’ A number of parent-governors assisted voluntarily in the activities. Other adults, such as the lunchtime assistants, were drawn in also (as audience for the play, in their case). As I leave the marbling group, I am thanked for coming in. By observing the marbling, I’ve been joining in with it. All are welcome.

Teammwork is paramount. Some of the activities – the drama, the music activities – are the product of a joint effort. In drama, especially, the group developed a strong feeling of working together. No one wanted to let the team down. Despite the age differences, they were all equal partners in this enterprise; and they accepted the teacher’s advice or criticism like professionals.

In music and composition, groups had to compose a verse, illustrate it, and set it to music. There was much experimentation and serious discussion:

How about if Tom (Class 6) and I go in the middle and you two go last?

Tom allocates parts . . . ‘And you two do the singing as well. . .’

‘OK, get ready you three’ . . . He counts them in, 1, 2, 3 . . .

Now let’s all do the singing . . . (Fieldnote)
Where a class was divided into groups, there was still a sense of cooperation among, rather than competition between, the groups. In the music and composition class, for example, the groups were arranged in a circle for the performances, so they could all see each other, and take part in each other’s performances. We all join in the singing of each group’s verse. Denise ensures all participate, giving especial attention to the youngest. Some are timid on their instruments at the first attempt. ‘Rebecca (Year 1), did you play yours?’ They do it again, much better, and we all applaud. Rebecca is pleased. Denise brings the little ones into the community, often with a personal comment that shows she esteems the child as an individual at the same time. She is liberal with her praise: ‘Tom, you kept time beautifully, well done! It’s not easy to keep the beat! Do they get a thumbs-up or a (indicates thumbs down)?’ Of course, it is a thumbs-up. There is no sense of one group being better than another. They are all good in their own terms, with the class as a whole doing the evaluation.

At times, social interaction was at a personal level, as their task allowed and as they worked. They were getting to know each other, and developing confidence in children of different age groups:

Jade’s table are having a chat about things. ‘Do you like Miss Dawkins? . . . Do you like Mrs Thomas?’ . . . ‘The girls are better than the boys, aren’t they?’ They discuss some family things. ‘Where do you live?’ The little girl tells them her address. (Fieldnote)

However, the most notable feature was the extent of learning among the children themselves. The children were urged to discuss ideas between themselves. Sylvia Newnham urges, ‘Talk to a partner, that always helps. . . . If you can’t draw, Mrs Heden or I will help you.’ Particularly noticeable here was the way in which older children aided younger ones. There were many examples of this. In general, teachers suggested that the older pupils might help in this way, but they chose if, when and how they did it.

Rob reported: ‘It does the heart and soul good to walk round the school and see the older children sitting there with an arm round a little one saying “No, do it this way.”’

Older children sometimes learnt from younger ones. The youngest in a group sometimes provided the basic idea for the group’s activity. Thus, in one group in musical composition, Sophie (Class 1) had the main idea for their verse: ‘The ants go marching three by three, the little one stopped to have some tea.’ This was then illustrated and set to music by the whole group. The following fieldnotes give examples of interactive teaching and learning:

Denise applauds the performance of one of her groups in musical composition: ‘The younger ones know exactly what to do, and that’s
because of the older ones explaining. Well done! It won’t work other- wise.’ (The younger ones smile at this praise.)

Jade is assisting several younger children in bubble painting: ‘Choose what colour basket you want. Do you want this? Or this?’ She tells another little girl to ‘Come here’, patting a seat beside her. ‘Do you know where your balloon is? Shall we start another colour, because you only have three? Did you want blue, or red?’ Jade seems in charge of the whole table. ‘Yours is coming on, Victoria.’

Victoria (Class R) is doing a garden scene for her collage. So far she has a sunflower in the middle and a bumblebee in one corner. Tom (Class 6), sitting beside her round a corner of the table, helps her. He advises against colouring in with crayon as she is about to do, and suggests pasting on some coloured paper. ‘What colour do you want for the sunflower? Yes, can you see any yellow anywhere? Right, well let’s cut the yellow bits out of that.’ Tom shows her how and where to cut, leaving her to do it, and then paste it. ‘Well done! Push it down.’ Tom chops off a large bit of paper from the magazine, easier for Victoria to handle, and gives it to her: ‘Do you want to cut the yellow out? … Very good!’ He draws a line in pencil on another piece for her to cut along: ‘Mind your fingers!’ (Sylvia Newnham remarks ‘You can tell he has two younger sisters, can’t you?’)

Hope (Class R) is doing a butterfly in collage. Showing Jade (Class 6) a shell, she asks, ‘How do you stick it down?’ ‘That won’t stick, you need plenty of glue.’ Jade next creases some coloured paper for Hope to cut along. ‘Very good!’ Jade peels off the backing and cuts off small bits for Hope to stick. She then takes her to the paper table to show her more stickers. (Fieldnotes)

Working with children of all ages, and especially younger children, was the most gratifying aspect of the activities for Class 6 children. The following are comments from their written review:

I have enjoyed working with the younger ones especially, because they can ask you for your help, so you know that they can trust you, and it might encourage them to help other people when they’re in Year 6.

We have learnt to work with older and younger children.

It was good making friends with other years. The younger children are not so shy because they are meeting new people.

I have especially enjoyed working with the little ones

… and helping to encourage them to think of their own designs.

… because they were good at nearly everything.

… because I wasn’t very confident before.
... because they were really funny and cute.
... because they got really messy in blow-painting.

Some also said they enjoyed working with different teachers in different classrooms. Here we see some good examples of ‘scaffolding’ – the process of propping up a child’s learning until it is internalized and the child can use the knowledge on his or her own (Bruner, 1985). But there are also beneficial educational reverse effects for the older children, improving social skills, bringing intrinsic rewards, and raising confidence and self-esteem.

Pupil achievement

The activities give free rein to pupil creativity, the extent of which has been a revelation to teachers. One teacher thought the ‘end products were better and better as the weeks progressed’. Sue Roberts wondered where their conceptualization comes from. Do they see it when they start? Does it develop? At what point? Sue thinks adults are more constrained, and hidebound by phobias. Children are more open and adventurous, more prepared to take risks and to play. The activities offer the children an increased range of opportunities for them to express, develop and discover skills and abilities. It’s about giving them confidence and letting them loose. They appreciated the freedom.

I like it because the teacher doesn’t take that long to explain.

I enjoyed marbling thoroughly because you get in a big mess and it’s good because it’s a case of experimenting.

In the printing you could get really messy and have a lot of fun at the same time.

Marbling was really good because you got to be really creative, and messy. ... It was amazing to watch the colours go in to one another. (Class 6 Review)

A multitude of skills is involved. For example, in drama and dance, Jennifer noted ‘the level of memory retention required is high – there are quite complex patterns and sequences. All the children, regardless of age, were able to remember and enact the necessary sequences.’ Other skills included: creativity, body movement/control/dance, musical sensitivity, emotional awakening and sustainment, co-operation/sharing, a blend of individual and joint responsibility, musical timing, translation of fantasy/legend/history, and relating to real life.

Activity-based work gives children the opportunity to appreciate authorship from the inside. For example, from the drama, children can develop a new sense of what ‘drama’ can mean, their participation and performance to
an audience giving new insights into its powers of expression and emotional involvement. The initial session was fairly contrived, but as the lesson progressed, body movements and facial expressions became more expressive. They were coming from *within*, rather than from, for example, observations of TV. The teacher said, ‘Now the townspeople have to be frightened of this dragon’ and they all gave a wonderful display of fear. . . . Later, the teacher called upon the children in the final scenes to ‘become the dragon’. ‘Use your eyes, hands and bodies to become this frightening creature.’ There was an uninhibited response from both boys and girls – an example of how gender, as well as age, lines are crossed at times in these activities.

There are orchestrating skills, most noticeably in music. ‘Now put down your instruments. We’ve had the thinking, the drawing, the writing, the experimenting.’ Now comes the performance, with the rest of the class as the audience, arranged in a circle so they can all see each other. But ‘putting things together’ applied to other activities too, for example, bubble painting which was ‘in two parts – a balloon bit and then the bubbles, and then you have to put it all together’. Also, in printing,

I really liked it because you were split up into three groups (big ones and little ones) and took it in turns to draw the background, make your butterfly and paint the animal.

All the activities followed a similar pattern, involving some kind of introduction and demonstration from the teacher to stimulate ideas, a stage of ‘controlled chaos’ as children played with ideas and experimented, a coming together of the most profitable ideas, and finally, a performance or demonstration of some kind of the completed product. They have the same kind of structure as ‘critical events’ (Woods, 1993), suggesting that this is a useful, general structure for creative activities.

Some children discovered hidden talents.

In collage, Nathan has done a snail race, Tom a rocket, Oliver a brilliant bicycle. ‘Are you an artist, Oliver?’ I ask. ‘No,’ he says, modestly. But he clearly is.

In mask-making, Charlie (Class 1) is doing exceptional work. ‘Look at these lines,’ says Sue Roberts, as he draws some almost perfectly straight lines across the forehead of his monster design. ‘This is a fang-drinking monster,’ he explains, adding some green warts. ‘They come up with some really good ideas,’ says Sue. ‘It’s been a surprise.’

Kim Heden had also been surprised, especially by boys. ‘You don’t think of collage as a boy’s activity’, but a number had done brilliant work, some showing extraordinary patience. ‘It always amazes me the patience everybody’s got!’ Similarly in drama and dance.

Tom (Year 1) is bubbling with ideas in music and composition as his
group experiments with animals and rhymes. He suggests ‘bees’. Nicola (Year 6) adds ‘buzzing’, then Tom suggests ‘hippos, snakes hissing, mice squeaking, penguins’... Gemma (Year 4) adds ‘waddling’. They settle on the last. Denise tells him ‘You have some lovely ideas, Tom.’ (Field-notes)

For collage, I did a snail made out of shells and string and also sand. I think that my snail was the best piece of artwork I have ever done. I have improved my artwork a lot more and I’m happy about that as I’ve never trusted myself in art and I do now as I think I’m better. (Hannah L., Class 6)

I’ve improved on using my imagination when I’m doing collage and masks. I never used to enjoy painting. Now I do. (Tom B.)

I have improved on a lot of things but mostly on my ideas of what I am going to do. I am more imaginative in my designs. (Frazer) (Class 6 Review)

There were some brilliant results in artwork, but it was not always easy to explain how they were achieved, other than through experimentation and inspiration. I talked to some boys about marbling. The secret here, I understand, is not to use too much ink. Some have got rather heavy ink blobs, others are quite artistic. You can see how some books acquire those exquisite covers. They explained to me how it is done with different coloured inks. OK, but how did they get such a good result as this? ‘We put too much ink in, it can come out really horrible. We put one piece of paper in, then another.’ In other words, they defied the rules but came lucky through repeated experimentation. It is not easy to explain how things come out well. ‘How did you design yours?’ ‘I did lines like that.’ ‘Why this line in beans?’ ‘I just did it like that.’

It seems necessary to make the resources available, explain the object of the activity and show a few basic techniques to get them started. The same applies to collage. Kim doesn’t want to restrict the children. They need their freedom. She wants them to develop an image in their own mind, and then find the resources to do it, rather than be constrained by the resources that are available (though they are multifarious in her room – suggestive rather than constraining – all sorts of pasta, beans, peas, rice, sticky paper in different colours, crepe paper, cotton wool, sand, shells, magazines, cardboard, buttons, corks, etc. – and of course, glue). Kim wants them to think about how things feel as well as how they look, introduces them to a wide range of examples. Among the completed collages, I notice a saxophone, a sea scene, fireworks, a jungle scene, a race track, name plaques, a little sister, a garden scene (with clouds and rainbow), a horse and stables, a coelanth, Thunderbirds, football shirts, a colourful wriggly snake (interestingly
textured with scrunched-up crepe paper). . . . Here is a desert scene by Tom, with sun, glaring sand, cactus; here a dinosaur, a T. Rex. . . . ‘This shows where the meteorite hit. . . . This is ancient England.’ Brilliant.

Weaving is done on a simple frame that they make with twigs (which Lucy Snook’s class bring in), using different coloured wools, then decorating the triangle with decorative paper, buttons, or whatever. There are design and finger skills being developed here, and patience has to be learnt in getting things right, over and under, after making a satisfactory frame. They start from nothing, with bits and pieces, a bit chaotic, getting started, keeping going, with the teacher and the older children scaffolding younger children’s work. Lucy has to work quite hard as she gets many queries; sometimes she says ‘That’s all right.’ I ask some children what they are making but they are not sure. Lucy says they have been called ‘dream patterns’. They are about colour, different materials blending together, and the feel of things.

Symbolically, children are allowed to dress in what they like today, notionally to support a charity. But it helps to mark the day out as different, adding to their sense of individuality, and signalling that the activities belong to them as individual persons, rather than to some externally prescribed model of a pupil.

Teacher professionalism and morale

Established teachers have had a difficult time over the past decade. The coherence and security of the old primary teacher’s identity, together with its value structure and personal autonomy, have come under attack, and with it, a great deal of its emotional supports and rewards like self-esteem, confidence, sense of ultimate achievement and well-being. As a result, the isomorphism of the old identity whereby teachers were so committed that they felt their teacher roles and personal selves were one (Nias, 1989), have, for many, become fragmented. For many, vocational commitment has been replaced by a more pragmatic instrumentalism (Pollard et al., 1994; Osborn et al., 2000; Woods and Jeffrey, 2002). Day 10 offered the teachers a counter-balance to these tendencies.

Teachers have a degree of freedom they do not have elsewhere in the curriculum. They generate their own activities. They go to Rob and say ‘I have an idea for next time.’ Democracy prevails – among teachers and children. The idea of a Day 10 was discussed among the staff, and they volunteered suggestions. Some had to learn themselves, and there is a sense of all learning together. There is a degree of self-renewal here (cf. Woods, 1995). Denise says it reminds her of things she used to do and enjoy in her earlier years of teaching. She considers it the children’s ‘entitlement’. One of the great joys is that of working together – all ages and both sexes – and teachers too have a great collaborative sense. It ‘rejuvenates’ the staff. Denise gets up
in the morning and thinks, ‘Oh good, this is creative arts day.’ Teachers con-
trast some other ‘nose to the grindstone’ days (usually Mondays). The pres-
sures are incessant, particularly this (summer) term, with SATs, report
writing, parents’ evening . . . a very heavy schedule. Day 10 is such a won-
derful restorative.

Rob thought Day 10 was ‘pretty discrete . . . because of the mixed groups,
children across the whole school, it doesn’t fit into the normal curriculum’. But Rob thought this was a good thing,

Because it’s nice to have a break from the normal curriculum, to set
aside one part of the curriculum we can concentrate on and enjoy. For
the staff, too, it’s a relief not having to plan two hours in the morning
of literacy and numeracy, bang, bang, bang! (hammering it in). Of
course it needs planning itself, but once planned it can be changed,
modified, augmented, supplemented. We can change one or two things
that didn’t work last time, but essentially the core planning remains the
same.

Elsewhere in the week, Rob has rearranged the morning schedule to fit
things in. Numeracy and literacy used to take the whole morning, but Rob
has brought the morning break forward, yielding an extra half an hour after-
wards wherein they can do history and geography, more subjects that have
been squeezed into the National Curriculum. This is an illustration of how
tight things are. There is ‘not enough time to draw breath’. ‘Sometimes we
have to say “Stop!” and we have to do what is best for these children in our
immediate setting, and if there’s a need we have to address it.’ Day 10 has to
be seen against this background of unrelenting pressure.

Though any direct relationship to the rest of the curriculum may not be
clear, it obviously has an influence in helping to sustain teacher morale, and
hence helping them to get through prescribed requirements. There are
possibly other gains. Denise remarked how much more flexible she was over
the Literacy Hour, compared to the early stages when she was quite rigid. So
some space is being found elsewhere for teacher creativity. Day 10 must aid
this process.

After viewing the drama and dance activity, Jennifer observed that it
required a strong and talented teacher to draw from the children the very best
in creative terms. Huge amounts of initiative and energy are required, in
which teachers express their own creativity. Teachers and children both
become caught up in the activity as a unit, not as teacher transmitting a body
of knowledge or skills to pupils. Teachers, perhaps, feel a sense of freedom,
and a sense that they are contributing and sharing some of their own expertise
which they consider of value but which is not valued in formal require-
ments. They are also able to practise the kind of constructivist, scaffolding
pedagogy basic to child-centred learning. Sue Roberts commented that ‘We
don’t teach’, meaning, I think, ‘We don’t instruct’. But there was plenty of guidance, advice, illustration, stimulation, encouragement, enthusing, inspiring – at class, group and individual levels.

Also, teachers are able themselves to evaluate the relative ‘success’ of a particular session, which must contribute to a sense of self-worth. One teacher said she felt ‘enormous satisfaction and pride in the work produced by the children’. Like the children, the teachers look forward to this day.

Jennifer feels this would be excellent preparation for student teachers, themselves with diverse skills, abilities and interests. It would allow them to bring something of themselves into what otherwise might seem new, strange situations, and modify the sense of being judged by a supervisory teacher in a strange, new area.

**DISCUSSION**

How have the teachers’ aims as specified in the introduction been met? On the evidence presented here, it might be claimed that a start has been made on aims 1 and 2, though there is still a long way to go and, arguably, ultimately requires some relaxation of government pressure, if not their support and encouragement. There is a sense in which balance can only be achieved when the evaluation and assessment of creative arts activities is given equivalent status to the rest of the curriculum, and/or when it permeates that curriculum in meaningful ways. There has been some clear progress on aims 3 and 4, sufficient to surprise and delight the staff, and to cause them to consider how they might take these further (see below). But the clearest achievements to date have been in aims 5 and 6, which might be regarded as a necessary first step, since they are conduits to the other four aims.

What, therefore, are to be the longer-term aims? For example, the overall response to the children’s creative efforts was one of praise. This is probably quite right, but how can one inject a note, if not of critique, of how one could do things better? How can one do better collage, mask-making, weaving, etc.? They sample an activity once, and then move on. Is there a carry-over of skills from one activity to another? Is there *development* of skills and creativity from session to session, or do they stay locked at a certain level within each separate activity?

The staff do have this under consideration. One problem is resources. Rob said they could do these things better if they had more space. Activities had to be done in classrooms not designed or equipped for them – typical of primary schools in general. Also, two different large groups had to share one of the classrooms. Day 10 then had to be abandoned in the autumn term of 2001 because of repair work being carried out in the hall. But it is now under way again, and with the additional advantage of a brand-new IT suite.
Another problem is time. We have drawn the contrast between ‘going with the flow’ and ‘getting done’ as teaching approaches (Woods and Jeffrey, 1996). The former seeks to maximize learning opportunities as they occur; the latter is primarily concerned with task completion within the allocated time, come what may. The spirit of Day 10 seems to be with ‘going with the flow’. However, the activities all have an aim, an end product, and are structured toward that end. How far does the structure lean more towards ‘getting done’ rather than ‘going with the flow’? One of the common themes in the children’s evaluations was the request for more time to complete activities.

How does Day 10 relate to the National Curriculum? If they stand apart from it, isn’t this contrary to the Plowden spirit of ‘holistic’ learning (Sugrue, 1997)? Is there a danger of children seeing this as not real learning, just a bit of fun as a reward for working well the rest of the time? A teacher commented: ‘We may not really have developed any real art skills. Is this art or is this play?’ One boy liked the activities a lot because ‘it was better than having to do work’. Another because it was ‘much better than normal work. You can do a lot more fun stuff and you don’t have to work in silence.’ One can see both good and alarming implications in such a comment. Is one ‘play’ and the other ‘work’? If so, where does ‘real learning’ reside? But then, as Sue Roberts, pointed out, the National Curriculum is not holistic, but subject-specific and even within that, highly selective. Is learning, therefore, inevitably compartmentalized under the current regime?

Some of the criticisms of Plowdenism during the late 1980s were of a certain ‘woolliness’ of approach, and of children often being off-task for long periods (Alexander, 1992). How is this avoided? For example, the creativity in a group might come from one or two children, while others might contribute nothing. There might be friction between children. In one group I observed, the Class 6 girl pushed away a younger boy and told him to ‘Shut up!’, observing to herself that ‘this is getting annoying’. The boy contributed little to the team’s efforts. Older helping younger children was a high point of the activities but, as Sylvia Newnham pointed out, ‘It’s a fine line between helping and doing it for them.’ Some coaching might be required, based on the approaches of the more successful and skilled older children.

Day 10 is not altogether out of line with current developments. A number of ‘key skills’ in the National Curriculum are involved, such as teamwork, problem-solving, communicating. Initiatives like this could be a way of restoring balance to the curriculum, preserving what is best in the prescribed National Curriculum, but working in some flexibility. Such activity could be the beginning of a movement towards integration of the curriculum and more flexible pedagogy. Before the recent spate of reforms removed them from schools’ agendas, projects presented one way of getting over this problem and integrating learning (Woods, 1993). Perhaps the time is ripe to consider their reintroduction. They are not impossible at a school like Hackleton. Day 10
also seems well in keeping with current trends which are seeing a measure of
creativity re-entering the curriculum. The Robinson Report (NACCCE, 1999) put creativity back on the agenda. There is growing recognition of the
importance of emotions in teaching and learning, ignored by the rational
technicism of the government reforms of the 1980s and 1990s (Hargreaves,
1998; Day and Leitch, 2001). Finally, in reinvigorating teachers and enhancing
their own sense of professionalism, it makes them better equipped and
disposed to teach the full programme.

Do some of these points suggest more pupil choice? Choice was a quite a
strong feature within classes and groups. But what if children were given a
choice among activities? (This was suggested by some Year 6 children.) This
might enable some to specialize and develop in certain areas and might
heighten motivation even further. However, there could be problems with
this approach (uneven distribution among classes, inadequate sampling of
artistic pursuits). Also, one teacher thought the most positive outcome was
‘children taking part enthusiastically in activities they probably wouldn’t
choose, and surprising themselves with enjoying them and achieving pleas-
ing results’.

The success of Day 10 with children, teachers, parents and governors
guarantees its continuance. This is no longer a trial period, or a pleasurable
filling-up of space – the continuance has become a necessity for the reasons
given in this article. All the children of Year 6 enjoyed Day 10, and most
thought their skills, techniques and knowledge of artistic pursuits had been
improved, as well as their production of ideas and social skills.

In the children’s review, they suggested more activities (working with clay
got most mentions, followed by painting, sketching, papier-mâché, sport,
cooking and science – the latter a reminder that creativity is not restricted to
the arts, but applies to the whole of the curriculum); more variation, mainly
more activities, but ringing the changes from year to year; one suggestion was
for different foci in each term, such as art, science, sports; more time, perhaps
a whole day; more equipment, smaller groups and more helpers; allow
children to vote for which activities they do; go into assembly in groups or
abandon assembly so they can get down to work quicker.

In their review, teachers thought the most successful activities were those
where children were actively engaged in creating a worthwhile finished
product (such as marbling books), or where they were fully involved (as, for
example, in dance drama). Teachers suggested better funding and more
thorough planning; fitting it into a larger arts framework which would
include visiting artists, theatre, gallery and school visits, etc.; seeing if there
were specialist skills within the local community people would be willing to
share (cf. Woods, 1999); checking on the skills children are developing to keep
a balance; more activities (such as computer art, knitting, sewing, cookery,
wax relief, clay, salt dough modelling, drama, water colour workshops, sand
pictures). There are even more exciting future possibilities now the IT suite is completed. (One Class 6 girl remarked, ‘They start all the good things just as I leave’, meaning Day 10 and IT).

As an aid to meeting some of these perceived requirements, the staff are aiming to apply for an Artsmark award from the Arts Council of England. Artsmark aims to encourage schools to raise the standard of the arts and to raise the profile of arts education across the country. Some of the options in the scheme are ‘developing cross-art form work to enhance pupils’ understanding and experience of at least two different art forms’; ‘using the arts to develop a creative approach to learning in other curriculum areas’; ‘using ICT to enhance the delivery of the arts curriculum’. Other opportunities encouraged within lesson time include arts weeks, school productions, festivals and visits to arts venues, or by arts organizations, visits to and partnerships with arts practitioners and arts organizations. Schools need to share and celebrate pupils’ creative achievements within the whole-school environment, and in the community. Regular provision of out-of-hours sessions are also required. Schools need to have appropriate professional development opportunities for their teachers. In these ways, the Artsmark award offers a structure, additional incentive and focus for the next stage of Hackleton’s regeneration of the arts, and for advancing the ambitious aims they have set themselves.

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REFERENCES


