CREATIVE LEARNING AND THE NEW OFSTED FRAMEWORK

What’s in it for us?
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Robert Meadows September 2011

Come January 2012, primary and secondary schools will have the Ofsted inspectorate knocking on the door with a revised set of expectations. The argument of this ‘think piece’ is to prove the case that creative and cultural learning will be very significant in this revised Ofsted framework.

Over the last six months, pilot inspections have been used to ‘test out the effectiveness of the judgements and the revised criteria of the new framework and few changes are expected before the 2012 ‘launch’. Some teachers in schools inspected during the summer term of 2011 have expressed disappointment that there appeared to be very little focus upon creative learning and teaching; that there was an emphasis upon literacy and numeracy with little ‘credit’ given to curriculum innovation. Reports in the educational press have raised the spectre of ‘1000s of schools failing’ if pupils do not meet expectations based upon data. There have been loud rumbles of protest from schools that have been ‘downgraded’.

We need a more holistic approach that values everything a school does, but are being given a renewed focus on the three ‘Rs’. We need a more supportive process, but are being offered a level of monitoring that borders on harassment.

But perhaps the picture is not that bleak. Some have observed that the new framework ‘gives attention to ongoing achievements of pupils and does not rely on test and examination results’; there is general approval for the focus upon achievement and teaching as well that ‘leadership and management should focus strongly on improving the quality of teaching and learning’. Above all, the reduction in the number of judgements made from 23 to 4 is generally applauded. As for creativity and culture, this is firmly placed as something inspectors will look for when making judgements about the overall effectiveness of schools. It is explicitly stated that they nurture and promote pupils’ ‘ability to reflect on the experiences provided by the school, use their imagination and creativity, and develop curiosity in their learning’.

But let us look at what more we can gather from the pilot about its understanding of the ‘quality of teaching’, particularly with regard to how teaching develops skills associated with creativity.

Analysis of the 150 pilot inspections reveals some interesting findings. Scrutiny of the key recommendations and descriptions of best practice embedded within many of the reports predicated an approach of teaching and learning that many of us would applaud. It advocates and lavishes praise upon schools with mantras such as ‘Be the Best That You Can and ‘Leave No Pupil Behind’. It supports the work of teachers who do this by making learning challenging and achievable. There is an expressed expectation that the best practitioners in the classroom will be expert, enthusiastic and interactive. These A* teachers do not indulge in long explanations; they model. They ‘reduce the time spent talking at the class’ and get young people up and doing. Outstanding teachers set challenging, open-ended tasks based upon informed knowledge of what each individual child can do and of appropriate ‘next steps’, as well as supporting pupils to be independent and resilient learners. They give carefully-considered feedback that sets up ‘next steps’ learning for the pupils. They make learning ‘visible’, meaning that pupils’ needs are known by teachers so they have a better understanding of what that learning looks like and feels like for the students.

1 See the appendix for a summary of the revised framework.
2 TES June 2011.

The findings are based from reading the 150 pilot inspections that were carried out during 2011.
4 See Professor John Hattie ‘Visible Learning’. His influence on current thinking is said to be significant.
Who could argue with this? Wouldn’t we all have wanted to be taught by teachers who carry out their work in this way?

The pedagogy advocated in examples of best practice also supports the position of organisations like Curious Minds, that have evidenced how a focus on creativity has positive impacts on teaching and learning. What should give comfort from these findings is the emphasis on being imaginative and making meaningful connections across subjects. Successful lessons should be (or indeed must be?) relevant, enjoyable and well-paced. In fact, that word ‘pace’ is frequently mentioned in the pilot inspections. It is lively pace that helps pupils to ‘be creative’. They stress the importance of collaborative group work, learning outside the classroom, vivid practical experiences, learning through exploration as well as imaginative resources and classroom environments that are rich in stimulation. There are frequent references to questioning: open-ended, probing and ‘developmental’. So, the reports value a methodology that has more in common with what we have come to understand as creative learning. In satisfactory schools, ‘teacher talk dominates resulting in passive learning and rarely do teachers take risks to stimulate students to develop their grasps of new concepts’. Outstanding schools foster a climate that values creative thinking.

It should come as no surprise that the pilot inspections placed such a high value on questioning, imagining, connection-making and reflecting. The Ofsted survey on Creative Learning, published in January 2010, underlined the value, since proven elsewhere, of approaches that place creativity at the heart of the educative process. It stressed the benefits to pupils where ‘Teachers were seen to promote creative learning most purposefully and effectively when encouraging pupils to question and challenge, make connections and see relationships, speculate, keep options open while pursuing a line of enquiry, and reflect critically on ideas, actions and results’ and that ‘there is not a conflict between... national standards in core subjects and creative approaches to learning’. Allowing pupils to explore ideas through a creative process of trial, error and revision generally proved more (beneficial)... than firmly teacher-directed activities’. This same report was keen to stress the value of ‘over-coming teachers lack of confidence in working creatively’ through professional development, the ‘more effective promotion of creative learning’ by senior management through local training and continued ‘in-school support’. One of the report’s key findings was that ‘we’ must ‘support and sustain partnerships’ that have the expertise to develop creative learning.

5 Taken from observations made by inspectors in the pilot inspections.
6 See www.creativitycultureeducation.org/research-impact/ You will find key reports on the impact of the programmes.
The organisations best placed to provide support for these professional development needs are those who have managed the highly successful Creative Partnerships programmes from 2002 to 2011.

But what is Ofsted saying about the place of subject knowledge in the teaching and learning process? The pilot framework emphasises that good or outstanding teaching combines strong subject knowledge with effective teaching of the skills needed to learn and understand a subject effectively. In subject survey reports, creativity is given a high profile.

For instance, one of the key recommendations of The Excellence in English Teaching Survey published in May 2011 flagged the value of ‘innovative or creative curricula’; the significance of involving the learners by listening ‘very carefully to what pupils said about English, what they enjoyed doing and how they learnt best’; most significantly, that outstanding practice ‘provided rich extra-curricular experiences outside school, such as reading groups, theatre trips and working with creative practitioners.’ Outstanding English faculties ensured that classroom activities, wherever possible, involved real tasks, purposes, audiences and issues related to the local or wider community. In this way, the curriculum matched pupils’ needs and interests. The provision of ‘real contexts for learning’ featured in Ofsted’s recommendations for the teaching of Mathematics, advocating methodologies that ‘enable learners to apply mathematical techniques in their training, at work or in their personal lives’.

Learning needs to be set in ‘meaningful contexts’. This is echoed in findings from the STEM programme.

If we take a peek at Modern Foreign Languages, a recommendation in the 2010 summary report was that there should be ‘more focus upon being inventive’. It suggested that pupils should be encouraged to be ‘creative and... (for there to be more opportunities for pupils to...)... express themselves spontaneously from early in their language learning.’ There needed to more ‘authentic’ exposure to the culture of the foreign language and for pupils and teachers to be more confident in speaking in other languages. Some of the best practice in the Creative Partnership programmes have been those where ‘how to’ develop confidence was at the core the enquiry. These led to students being able to respond to everyday requests in the target language and offered opportunities to use it spontaneously and inventively. Projects using new technologies have seen numbers opting to study Modern Foreign Languages at GCSE double.

Arts Learning subjects, when surveyed, demonstrate many of those key features that will be looked for in the new Ofsted Framework from January 2012, namely the ‘personalised support students received from their teachers and tutors.’ Teachers in schools with outstanding arts and media practice ‘knew their students very well, and were keenly aware of different abilities and personalities and potential barriers to progress.’ In other words they were able to support and ‘challenge students’ to achieve their best; they can identify appropriate ‘next steps’. Teachers develop an ‘intellectual and creative curiosity’ in the students. Ofsted notes how the best schools ‘provide developed very productive links with businesses and employers’ and how ‘students benefit from a wide range of opportunities to work in industry-related contexts and to work alongside professionals and practitioners’. Case studies of excellent practice in PE cite how teachers support imaginative thinking and visioning. Professor John Hattie identifies Outdoor Education as one of the best models of making learning visible for young people.

The focus in the surveys of teaching History and Geography have different concerns. They seem to echo the Secretary of State for Education, the Right Honourable Michael Gove’s desire for there to be ‘a common stock of knowledge on which we can all draw’. Alarm bells have been rung in these surveys about teachers’ subject specific knowledge.

Improvements in primary school geography were ‘often being slowed down by primary teachers’ weak knowledge of geography, their lack of confidence in teaching it and insufficient subject-specific training’. Across the phases there should be a greater emphasis upon ‘developing pupils’ core knowledge in geography, particularly their sense of place’. Ofsted’s ‘History for All’ survey found that ‘some pupils found it difficult to place the historical episodes they had studied within any coherent, long-term narrative. They knew about particular events, characters and periods but did not have an overview.’ Primary school teachers’ subject specific knowledge was found to be shaky: ‘primary teachers did not themselves have adequate subject knowledge beyond the specific elements of history that they taught’. In secondary schools, the teaching of history was described as ‘marginalised’ when it was taught as part of integrated humanities courses as Key Stage Three.

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The villain of the piece was cited as ‘poorly planned and taught integrated units of work in the humanities... often linked to general skills-based initiatives, had resulted in less geography (and history) being covered’. Many schools have championed theme-based cross curricula as a way of nurturing and promoting creative skills. Are we to gather that it will be under fire during inspections? Case studies of best practice produced by the ‘The Geographical Association’ suggests not. They endorse a curriculum where teachers who have expert subject knowledge ‘not only develop their love of geography but also make connections with other subjects such as science, history and religious education.’ It is the importance of expert knowledge that is worth underlining, of course. Where this is in place, the thematic curriculum is successful. Furthermore, ‘The Historical Association ’is very clear about the importance of creative skills and attributes in the teaching of history. It places emphasis upon ‘visits to museums and places of historical interest, some local and some further afield as well as the value of ‘visitors... (who)... regularly come into school to talk to groups of students.’ These activities ‘generate vibrancy’ and in the words of students, “brought history alive”17. A distinctive and innovative curriculum combined with imaginative and sensitive teaching is the key to learner success is a key statement from case studies of best practice in history.

It would seem that both in the development of skills and in furthering subject knowledge, Ofsted will be looking for evidence of creativity and innovation where it is allied to making an impact upon achievement. Teachers will continue to need support to make such an impact. Where might that come from and what might it look like? One tool that has been very valuable is the Creative School Development Framework18. It has enabled schools to audit and identify ‘hot spots’ in its creative practice in a very systematic way. School managers have found it a valuable aid for self-evaluation. This will have added significance under the revised Ofsted framework as the leadership and management of the school will need to identify creative and cultural learning in order to be outstanding.

School leaders will also be expected to demonstrate attributes that are associated with creativity. They will need to have an ambitious and ‘unlimited vision’; be able to focus relentlessly – and with high expectations - on improving teaching and learning and base their actions on a deep and accurate understanding of staff and pupils’ skills and attributes. They will need to know how to access best practice and how to develop staff through ‘coaching’. School management will be encouraged to seek and use the best available knowledge, information and resources to ensure the school is a learning organisation. To do so, these leaders will have to look beyond their own school college gates. They must network with ‘external agencies’. As Ofsted stated in its Young Person’s Guide to Inspection, ‘Inspectors will also see whether the school is good at picking up good ideas from other schools and other organisations to help its pupils do well’19.

Head teachers who have done their homework will know how such partnership working with external organisations has a positive impact and one that is acknowledged by Ofsted. Under the ‘old framework’, 50% of schools involved in Creative Partnerships (CP) programmes managed by Curious Minds improve at least one Ofsted inspection grade and no school was downgraded20. 18 of the schools in the Ofsted Creative Learning survey of 2010 were CP schools. Young people who were involved in Creative Partnerships ‘achieved, on average, 2.5 better GCSE grades at 16’21. There have been impacts on literacy, numeracy, attendance and well-being. This is sometimes explicitly acknowledged in Ofsted reports as being central to giving teachers ‘confidence in using... much more creativity in their lessons [and] most teachers have responded imaginatively to the freedom to use space in different ways and to develop the curriculum.’ If more honest and acknowledged credit was given and explicit reference made by schools to the work of outside agencies in raising the achievement of young people when having conversations with Ofsted, there would, one suspects, be far more mentions.

18 The Creative School Development Framework was used by Change Schools and Schools of Creativity. For further information, see www.creativitycultureeducation.org and for a report on the Change School programme, see Creative School Research Project October 2009.

20 From an audit of Change Schools working with Curious Minds September 2009.
21 See www.creativitycultureeducation.org.
It is also made explicit that excellent school leadership promotes an environment that favours creativity, innovation and calculated risk-taking - or ‘risk on purpose’ - whilst also focusing on the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the promotion of excellence and high levels of achievement. Such leaders ‘place a high value on creative learning experiences and creative teaching’. They act as ‘the lead enquirer, constantly leading and generating processes which encourage reflection, questioning and enquiry into developing practice and change within the school.’

Clearly, the National Council for School Leadership, through the nascent Teaching Schools, sees itself as being a key provider of support as do the subject associations. However, the hardcore expertise in enabling schools to identify, develop and evaluate the impact of creative practices lies within the creative and cultural sector who have been supporting the schools since ‘All Our Futures’. Very few head teachers have kept sufficiently up-to-date with key findings and best practices, as evidenced in the report on the Creative Partnerships Change School programme. Organisations that have been working in the territory offer senior management exemplary practice of how to ‘model’ creativity and risk taking; expose them to new thinking and experiences; suggest strategies that promote individual and collaborative thinking and design; show pathways for schools to embrace experimentation. Most significantly, through advisory services and mentoring, they can and have supported school leaders’ ability to imagine what might be and share that with others.

Another area that will require support is in exploring more effective ways of communicating with parents and carers. Those 150 pilot inspections refer to what parents have stated to be concerns. Evaluative comments are made by inspectors based on how such concerns are addressed by whole school staff. Outstanding schools take into account what parents have to say about: achievement; teaching and learning; leadership and management; pupil behaviour. Considerate and convivial schools, ones that place stress upon appropriate care, discipline and relationships whilst also asserting the importance of ‘fun and enjoyment in the learning process’ will be well-placed to meet the highest judgements as will be those that draw on the experience of parents to assist in the learning experience. Creative schools have been very effective at reaching out to parents and placing ‘the school within the context of the wider community’. The role of external partners has often been instrumental in forging and strengthening such links. They could fulfil another role. Initial Teacher Education Continuing Professional Development programmes provide teachers with very little guidance as to how to communicate meaningfully with parents. Creative advisors and practitioners would seem strongly placed to offer such support to individual schools and local networks, offering approaches and drawing upon case studies of effective practice from across the country as well as cutting-edge current research.

Under the new Ofsted framework, behaviour and safety will be rigorously inspected. To be outstanding, a school should encourage ‘high levels of engagement, collaboration and cooperation in and out of lessons’.

Pupils will be good ‘self-managers’, adept at managing their own behaviour in the classroom and in social situations. An inspection will also look for evidence of opportunities given for young people to ‘contribute’.

The new framework will look at how bullying is addressed through consultation with pupils and parents. How effective is the school at discussing what constitutes risky behaviour? How does it investigate and address the causes of non-attendance? To meet this criteria calls for high level skills and proven experience in drawing out honest, personal reflections from young people about what is significant to them in their learning and attitudes towards both school and their own culture. Again, one needs to raise the question as to whether teachers are best placed to have these conversations with students. Pupils can be more honest and objective when talking to adults who do not work within their schools as staff members. There is a highly-trained and experienced regional and national workforce of practitioners who have conducted pupil consultations exploring these issues and many others, using tightly-framed evaluations. Using the skills of such learner voice consultants could be beneficial. Furthermore, encouraging pupils ‘to contribute’ would also involve forging strong partnership with organisations working within the local, wider and national community. The new bridging organisations, such as Curious Minds, set up by the Arts Council might be very significant here in making known what offers the creative and cultural sector can make to young people.

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22 See National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCE) (1999), All Our Futures. Department for Education and Employment and Department for Culture, Media and Sport. London: DFES.

23 See ‘Creativity, School Ethos and the Creative Partnership Programme’ Sara Bragg and Helen Manchester The Open University May 2011.

24 Formerly termed ‘creative agent’ from the Creative Partnerships Programme.

25 See ‘The Evaluation Schedule for use in the Pilot Inspections Summer 2011 only’.

26 See http://www.curiousminds.org.uk/bridge-organisation.
‘Culture’ makes an appearance as ‘additionality’ in the ‘overall effectiveness’ section of the new Ofsted inspection. Schools will be expected to promote the ‘cultural development of pupils’ and provide ‘artistic, sporting and other cultural opportunities’. It must also give opportunities for ‘understanding... (and appreciating a)... range of different cultures’. For an outstanding school, this is summed up as ‘the school’s relentless and wide-ranging promotion of the pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development enables them to thrive in a supportive, highly cohesive learning community.’ No one is likely to argue against this as an aim but are schools in the position to achieve this without external agencies to guide and offer expertise?

For a start, they will need terms of reference. How clear is the understanding of cultural learning within schools? How widely shared? Schools, themselves, are not at the cutting edge of understanding what is meant by cultural learning. At the moment there is great variation in that understanding and in the ‘cultural offer’ made by schools. There are beacons of good practice but few opportunities to share this across networks. Most schools need support to clarify definitions of cultural learning and to think through how providing access to cultural opportunities will enrich the lives of young people and raise their aspirations. This support can be found in the exceptionally thorough fieldwork-based research such as that of Sara Bragg and Helen Manchester into school ethos and key papers such as the Cultural Learning Alliance’s consultation, ‘Get it’! The Power of Cultural Learning. It comes as no surprise that cultural organisations, not schools, have taken the lead providing networking opportunities to explore this area. They have access to knowledge and opportunities. They can offer advisory and brokerage services. They have tried and tested models for mentoring school management to improve cultural leadership within the learning sector. They offer programmes of continuing professional development that identifies and disseminates tried and tested best practice. It is the cultural sector that can address the lack of a common language; it is they who can ensure access to a broader cultural entitlement and enrichment for young people and their families.

So what is on the ‘to do’ list for preparing for the ever-expected inspection?

There seems to be support available to gather, handle and present data in ways that demonstrate pupils’ achievement and ‘a narrowing of the attainment gap’. There are many educational consultants in the field of ‘numeracy and literacy strategies.’ And it is likely to be ‘boom time’ for the experts in phonics and behaviour management.

The focus in this ‘thinkpiece’ has been upon raising other territories of significance relating to the new framework. There are going to be some very specific ‘wants’. Primary and secondary schools will want a clear understanding of what is meant by creative and cultural learning and be able to articulate how this is shared with all staff, pupils, parents and carers. There will be an expectation that the school works with partner organisations in ways that benefit, raise and enrich the aspirations of young people. Certainly, school leaders will want to look at the importance of developing creative skills as part of the teaching process: how does the teacher inspire, excite and innovate? How do they identify next steps in a child’s learning in imaginative, engaging and effective ways? The school management, itself, will be expected to model creative behaviours too. There will also have to be more thorough, open and honest conversations with parents and pupils about their perspectives on how their child is educated and whether they feel that the school is a happy and safe place. Schools will want to continue to be outward-looking. Collaborations with other schools will satisfy some of these wants. However, ‘deep’ expertise in supporting creative and cultural learning calls for specific knowledge, skills and understanding offered by organisations such as Curious Minds. These are the challenges and opportunities ahead.

For more information on the support Curious Minds can provide, please visit our website www.curiousminds.org.uk or call to speak to a member of the team on 01282 435835

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27 See www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk.
A summary of the New Ofsted Framework

Achievement

Our proposal is to judge pupils’ achievement by giving particular attention to:

- How well all pupils learn, the quality of their work and the progress they have made since joining the school
- How gaps are narrowing between different groups of pupils
- The standards attained by pupils by the time they leave the school
- The progress of disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs
- In primary schools, pupils’ attainment in reading by the age of six and by the time they leave school, and their standards of numeracy
- In secondary schools, pupils’ progress and standards in literacy.

Contextual value-added measures of progress

When CVA is withdrawn, we propose to use straightforward value-added measures in place of most of the CVA ones. These will indicate the progress of pupils since the time they joined the school and they will help inspectors to assess the impact the school has made on pupils’ progress. We propose to develop these measures further to include value-added information for particular groups of pupils. We will continue to use any relevant available data about the school’s intake of pupils, and judgements about attainment and progress will be made in relation to comparisons with similar schools.

Pupils’ behaviour and safety

We propose to judge pupils’ behaviour and safety by giving particular attention to:

- Their conduct in lessons and around the school
- Their attendance and punctuality at school and in lessons
- Their behaviour and attitudes towards others, and respect for other young people and adults, including the way pupils treat one another
- How well they are protected from bullying
- The views of pupils and the views of parents and carers.

The quality of teaching

We propose to judge the quality of teaching by giving particular attention to how well:

- Teachers demonstrate high expectations, enthuse, engage and motivate pupils so that they learn and make progress
- Teachers set challenging tasks
- Teachers use their expertise to deepen pupils’ subject knowledge and understanding and teach them the skills needed to learn for themselves
- Teachers assess pupils’ progress, provide them with constructive feedback, and plan lessons to match their needs
- Teaching and other support provides for each pupil’s individual needs including those of disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs
- How effectively pupils are taught to read and to develop their skills in literacy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

We propose to judge the effectiveness of leadership and by how well:

- Leaders and managers demonstrate ambition for pupils and improvements in their achievement
- Leaders and managers improve teaching and learning
- Leaders and managers support and develop staff
- How effectively the school is improving and has capacity for sustaining its improvement.
In addition, we propose to consider:

- The accuracy of the school’s self-evaluation and the use made of its findings
- The appropriateness of the curriculum in helping all pupils to achieve well
- The impact of governance on school improvement
- How effectively pupils are safeguarded
- How well the school ensures equality of opportunity, promotes the confidence and engagement of parents and works in partnership with other schools and external agencies to improve further.

The overall effectiveness of the school
We propose to judge the overall effectiveness of the school by giving particular attention to the judgements about:

- The achievement of all pupils
- Behaviour and safety
- The quality of teaching
- Leadership and management with consideration of how well the school promotes pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The effectiveness of the sixth form
We propose to report on the school sixth form within the four key areas, covering teaching, behaviour, leadership and achievement.

Inspection arrangements
We propose to continue with the process of risk assessment that takes into account:

- Current attainment and progress
- Changes in attainment and progress since the last inspection
- Pupils’ attendance
- The findings from any survey visits carried out by Ofsted since the last inspection
- Any significant issues brought to Ofsted’s attention, including safeguarding concerns and parental complaints.

We also intend to take greater account of parents’ and carers’ views in helping to decide when a school should be inspected. We propose to gather parents’ views by inviting them to answer a range of questions about their children’s school via Ofsted’s website. These will be taken into account as part of the risk assessment.

We propose to carry out an annual risk assessment of good and outstanding schools, beginning 3 years after their previous inspection, as part of the process of selecting schools for inspection. We will also continue to inspect a small percentage of good schools as part of a sample of ‘good’ provision. Both good and outstanding schools will continue to be inspected as part of Ofsted’s thematic survey inspections.

The assessment takes into account:

- Current attainment and progress
- Changes in attainment and progress since the last inspection
- Pupils’ attendance
- The findings from any survey visit carried out by Ofsted since the last inspection
- Any significant issues brought to Ofsted’s attention, including safeguarding concerns and parental complaints.

We propose to bring forward a full inspection of a satisfactory school if the monitoring inspection suggests that the school has made limited or poor progress in improving its performance.

This might be considered, for example, where:

- Standards of attainment and progress, including standards in reading in primary schools, are persistently low and there are few signs that the teaching strategies adopted by the school are bringing about the necessary improvements
- The quality of teaching and learning varies greatly across subjects and/or year groups and this is not being tackled effectively by leaders and managers persistent disruption in lessons and misconduct around the school are impeding pupils’ progress and undermining parents’ confidence in the school.