



Arts-led, schools-focused resources exploring
new approaches to school development

The Narrative of My Creative School

How the arts can support schools

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Introduction

My Creative School (MCS) was a two-year programme of arts-led projects which ran from 2016 to 2018. We worked with 18 primary schools across South London to co-deliver 'Creative Catalyst' projects. These forged new models of working between creative practitioners and teachers, developing creative approaches to school improvement and curriculum delivery.

The programme was underpinned by an ethos of supporting School Development Plan priorities through arts activity in both CPD and classrooms, to embed creativity in teaching and learning.

Three main models of practice emerged across the Creative Catalyst projects, characterising the programme overall:

- Pioneer teachers: Teachers empowered to pioneer new ideas
- Immersive adventure: Igniting appetites for learning
- Child leaders: Children directing their own learning

These models have informed the My Creative School Learning Resource. Where you see these icons, you too can think through what it is to be a pioneer teacher, how to create an immersive adventure and support children to lead.

In this resource

This resource contains three short essays to introduce you to the MCS programme and why it made such a difference in participating schools – and how a similar approach could make a difference in yours, too.

This is one of three parts of the My Creative School Learning Resource. You may also be interested in our Compendium of Ideas and Framework for Change resources available here: www.anewdirection.org.uk/mcslearningresource



Why should we prioritise creative approaches to teaching and learning?

Life skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, risk taking and resilience are increasingly important to modern life. A 2017 Sutton Trust report identified that 88% of young people, 94% of employers and 97% of teachers consider them as important as academic qualifications – if not more so.¹ Many economists and business leaders argue that, in years to come, such flexible, creative skills will be more critical to employability than engineering, data analysis and any number of other STEM-driven subjects.²

Nearly three-quarters of teachers surveyed by the Sutton Trust said the arts were the most effective way for children to learn these skills, whether in school or through extracurricular activities. Schools rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted also tend to prioritise the arts and creative approaches to teaching and learning.³

Why, then, are arts on the back foot in terms of funding and school strategy across the country? Even schools with strong arts provision can often find it challenging to use it as a driver for more powerful, impactful learning experiences.

My Creative School (MCS) aimed to give the context, training and opportunity for teachers to embrace and engage with the arts as a powerful teaching tool. We did this by pairing working creative practitioners – in art, drama, dance, and music – with classroom teachers, so they could learn from each other and understand how best an arts-led approach could address key challenges as identified in school development plans. We also provided CPD for both the creative professionals and teachers, together and

separately, to deepen this exploration and to help embed the learning.

Most of our participating teachers weren't arts subject specialists; many began their MCS journey believing that they 'weren't creative' or 'couldn't do art' or performance. Such attitudes can easily transfer to young people, so a consistent theme across the two years of the MCS programme was that the creative skills that underpin the arts are inherent in everyone: the arts just help bring them into the light. Thus did we find PE specialists happily making sculptures or maths subject leads creating treasure hunts across an entire school.

The creative impulse is a human impulse, one that schools play a critical role in nurturing and developing. Creativity is the engine that built modern Britain and it will be arguably even more important in future, not least in our schools. My Creative School offered a pathway to that future, and we hope you find the lessons we've learned as useful and powerful as we have.

1. Life Lessons: Improving essential life skills for young people, Carl Cullinane and Rebecca Montecute, The Sutton Trust, October 2017

2. Broadly speaking, STEM includes any school subjects that cover aspects of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. See for example 'Full STEAM ahead as arts and tech shape future of skills together', Julie Feast, The Engineer, 5 July 2018, accessed on 12 July 2018 at <https://www.theengineer.co.uk/steam-future-skills/>

3. Why do good and outstanding OFSTED schools demonstrate a creative mind set and an understanding of the importance of creativity?, Drew Rowlands, IVE White Paper, 2017

How a Creative Catalyst ethos supports schools

MCS Programme
Researcher Sarah B Davies

More than an art project delivered in school, the MCS programme aimed to do something different.

Participating schools in the MCS programme received three terms of CPD and support, and created a term-long Creative Catalyst project.

A Creative Catalyst project supported a long-term ambition for change. Designed to support the needs of a school, these projects were delivered in partnership between a teacher and a creative practitioner, who brought their creative strategies to a school's challenge.

The MCS programme was underpinned by a set of principles which supported the success of our schools' Creative Catalyst projects. These were:

SDP-Driven

Creative Catalyst projects were developed in response to priorities identified in School Development/Improvement Plans (SDP).

Arts-Led

The arts were employed to support school-wide shifts in results and culture. The creative practitioners used their skills to assist schools to investigate an identified school priority in a different way.

Teacher focused

Teachers' learning was given as much priority as the arts project. Supporting the embedding of learning into practice was a key element, creating greater potential to develop change at a systemic level. Continuous strategies for consolidating learning were in place throughout the process, including learning journals, post-session reflection, sharing across staff and CPD.

To support teachers' learning, we developed two kinds of peer networks:

- **Communities of learning:** A regional approach to CPD and support, promoting local cultural venues, borough sharings and peer clusters. Networks of teachers met half-termly at regional gatherings where shared challenges, ideas and new collaborations could be explored.
- **Communities of practice:** Whole programme cohort CPD sessions to nurture a community of practice between teachers and creative practitioners, underpinned by shared learning. This helped to break down preconceptions, generate new knowledge and create a greater sense of a communal approach to school development.

Can a Creative Catalyst ethos support you?

Examples of SDP priorities MCS supported:

- Improving engagement in reading and writing.
- Increasing vocabulary.
- Developing independent learning.

We found that through employing the arts as a teaching tool, teachers could identify shifts in knowledge and understanding demonstrated, often gaining a new insight into the abilities/capabilities and understanding of their pupils.

Creative Catalyst projects do not require a large budget to get started. You can do a lot with the resources you currently have (making inventive use of any supplies at hand).

The key point is that you already have your SDP; a Creative Catalyst ethos simply proposes a new way of working towards achieving your priorities, with the added potential to develop new skills in your staff and pupils along the way.



For me it was the point where we realised vocabulary was actually very good. We wouldn't have come to that realisation. This allowed us to change our focus to creative writing, for children to use that vocabulary...

Class teacher



HAVE A GO!



To help, we have created tools to support you in designing a Creative Catalyst project to fit your school's needs and SDP.

You'll find:

- A framework to kick off your own Creative Catalyst project, from principles to practice
- A set of example project plans and case studies from MCS schools.

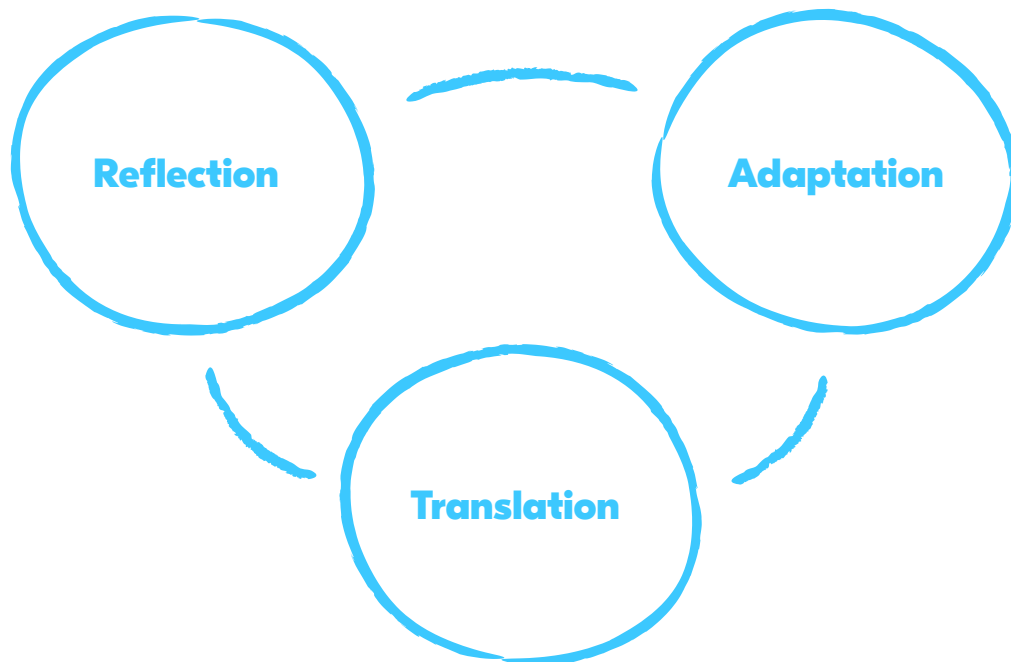
Could an arts-led approach to your school development priorities help achieve the change your school needs?

Adaptive Practice: Creating the conditions for new approaches to grow

MCS creative advocate
Greg Klerkx

During the MCS programme, a type of practice evolved to support the risk taking nature of the Creative Catalyst projects: Adaptive Practice.

Comprised of three ideas – reflection, adaptation, and translation – Adaptive Practice forms a cyclical notion of constant improvement of teaching and learning, catalysed by the arts, that is at the heart of MCS.



We outline the stages of Adaptive Practice with some ideas for you to try.

Reflection

Reflection can be a highly personal activity, but in the context of MCS it was also essential that reflection be collaborative, with teachers and creative practitioners sharing their skills and knowledge. We used a number of creative approaches to strengthen co-reflection, such as:

- I Like, I Notice, I Wonder – Why not try commenting on what happened in a session using only these phrases to begin, as in, 'I wonder what would happen if...', encouraging honesty and a non-judgemental atmosphere.
- Objects – Try selecting an object that reflects how you felt after a session. Go with instinct: something might simply appeal because it's comforting or uncomfortable, simple or complicated. Use the objects as you discuss and debrief.
- Free writing – Begin with a phrase like, 'That session felt...' and write what comes to mind for up to two minutes. Circle three words/phrases that seem most interesting as a starting point to unpick what happened in the session and what might improve the next one.

For more on reflection, see the Creative Lesson Evaluation tool in our Compendium of Ideas.

Adaptation

A constant readiness to adapt plans and delivery to accommodate change in progress was a feature of MCS and a strength of our teacher-creative practitioner partnerships.

How might you adapt your setting to fit your vision for your project? Two key considerations are space and time. These sets of questions can help guide your adaptation.

Space

- How far have you pushed the envelope when it comes to innovative use of physical space?
- If your school has constraints or concerns around using school spaces differently, can you create an agreement for how such transformations are to be managed, e.g., all spaces to be returned to their original state after X time of day, or on a given date?
- Can you find ways for other teachers and pupils to benefit from any transformations or novel uses of physical space, thus potentially increasing buy-in and participation?
- What can you do creatively with what's already in your classroom? What can be moved, removed, repositioned, reconfigured? How can you involve your pupils in this conversation or even get them to do the reconfiguring as part of an activity?

HAVE A GO!



Time

- How much 'flex' are you building into your session plans? Could you create short and long versions of an activity that allow you to pursue promising areas of pupil interest while still delivering desired work?
- If your project feels too time-constrained, could you create a 'time map' of the school day or week and try to identify extra time 'spaces' you might be able to work, whether for planning, delivery or reflection?



Creativity is like cooking in a slow cooker, if you take time to cook things you can get more interesting flavours.



Pupil

Translation

The third aspect of Adaptive Practice is translation. A key aim for MCS was to ensure that learning around creative approaches can be 'translated' into a broader school context, achieving practical outcomes and longer term impact across the school. Translational Practice within MCS was about sharing core ways of working across teachers and creative practitioners. It was about embedding new learning to inform and support new creative teaching and learning practices

Strengthening collaborations

We noticed three broad qualities that created the conditions for strong and effective collaborations and, thus, impactful creative projects throughout the MCS programme: vulnerability, resilience, and experimentation.

Vulnerability

At the core of being vulnerable is acknowledging not only that you might get things wrong, but also that getting things wrong has an impact. In MCS, acknowledging vulnerability had the effect of creating greater trust and a greater willingness to take risks.

Several creative practitioners worked well outside their core art forms, learning new skills as they went along; the same was true of teachers.

Resilience

An unwillingness to settle for 'OK' was a deep point of connection between teachers and practitioners. Great artists never settle for OK, and neither do great teachers. If at first you don't succeed, try again.

Experimentation

Experimentation requires both vulnerability and resilience because it so often ends in failure. This can be frustrating and difficult – particularly in high-pressure modern schools focused on achieving visible, measurable results.



The key to this project was us acting as support for the teachers. They are climbing a mountain, and for a short time we offered to carry bags, give water – offering permission and encouragement as they marched upwards.



Creative practitioner

We believe that Adaptive Practice is a useful framework for pedagogical development for arts-led school programmes and partnership working in schools. We have also seen Adaptive Practice support new creative practices in teaching and learning.

How might Adaptive Practice support teaching and learning in your school?

Logbook of ideas



Use this page to note down any ideas or inspiration as you make your way through the My Creative School Learning Resource.

Things I found interesting

What I will need to be able to do this

Ideas I want to explore

One thing I can do today

One thing I would tell a colleague to share what I've learned

Glossary

Creative Catalyst project:

A focused experiment or series of activities delivered using one or more art-forms, addressing a key priority or challenge in a school's Development Plan. Each Creative Catalyst project is generated by schools and refined in collaboration with a creative practitioner.

Arts:

Drama, music, spoken word, literature, poetry, visual art (drawing, painting, sculpture), animation, film, photography, sound art.

Creativity:

Harnessing qualities such as risk taking, problem solving, originality, imagination and innovation.

Pioneer Teachers:

Projects that focused on staff/teacher development, empowering them to pioneer new ideas and practices and allowing them to acknowledge their own development and wellbeing needs.

Immersive Adventures:

Projects that focused on creating exciting, experiential learning, capturing imaginations and engaging pupils in new ways through mysteries, adventures, WOW learning moments and immersive environments.

Child Leaders:

Projects that focused on children leading their own learning, exploring the breadth of the curriculum driven by their own interests, self-motivation and self-assessment, leading to broadened understanding and greater outcomes.

Adaptive practice:

A process of reflection, adaption, translation.

Creative practitioner:

A professional artist working in any art-form with substantial experience in applying both their artistic practice and its essential qualities, for the benefit of teachers and students.

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- Margaret Roper Catholic Primary School, Croydon
- Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Primary School, Kingston
- Priory School, Croydon
- Regina Coeli Catholic Primary School, Croydon
- St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Primary School, Bromley
- St. Benedict's Catholic Primary School, Medway
- St. Chad's Catholic Primary School, Croydon
- St. Fidelis Catholic Primary School, Medway
- St. John Fisher Catholic Primary School, Medway
- St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Bromley
- St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Kingston
- St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Bromley
- St. Peter and St. Paul Catholic Primary Academy, Bromley
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Unique approaches to School Development Priorities

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A New Direction grows the capacity of all children and young people to shape culture and be creative. We support London schools to deliver and embed high-quality arts and cultural provision across their curriculum and whole school community.