

BE AN ENGINE FOR CREATIVITY

Hannah Day looks at how primary schools can ensure their arts provision enables pupils to realise their true talents and potential in the years to come

Creativity in schools can be covered in a number of ways – most explicitly through subjects such as art, D&T and music, but creativity ought to be a school-wide consideration. Creative thought can be encouraged in any number of subjects, through activities that encourage experimentation and exploration, and by adopting a mindset that supports students in investigating, assessing and refining their skills.

For its 2017 'Creativity and the arts in the Curriculum' report (see tinyurl.com/nasuw-creativity), the NASUWT surveyed trends in teacher numbers and total hours taught in KS3 to KS5 art and design, D&T, drama, media and music between 2011 and 2015. In every subject and key stage, it identified decreases in hours taught that ranged from -8.2% for music to 219% for D&T. The only creative subject that seemed to buck the trend was media, which grew its KS3 teacher headcount and hours taught by 12.5% and 4.5% respectively.

The report's figures convey a stark and simple message – that creative subjects are reaching fewer students, and that the provision for those being taught them is shrinking. Since the report's publication there have been no significant changes in this area in terms of broader curriculum priorities, government policies or communications from Ofsted.

WHY IS CREATIVITY IMPORTANT?

According to government's own statistics, the creative industries employed over two million people in 2018, equating to 6.2% of all UK jobs. Add those employed in the cultural and digital sectors, and the size of that workforce tops four million.

However, creative education extends far beyond being a training route for those wanting to work in, say, the film, TV, publishing and architecture sectors. Lessons in creativity help develop skills that benefit

young people across all areas of life. GCSE and GCE qualifications – the courses that primary schools lay foundational skills for – encompass research, developing ideas, evaluating and recording progress, and refining and tuning those ideas into coherent outcomes. These are all skills that are worth developing, whichever future paths your young people ultimately end up taking.

Ensuring that creativity is valued throughout your curriculum can additionally feed into wider pupil attainment and assessment outcomes at primary level. This can be seen in research carried out by The Cultural Learning Alliance (see tinyurl.com/ccla-cfd) which offers an array of supporting statistics. These include the finding that participation in structured arts activities can increase cognitive abilities by 17%, and the discovery that learning through arts and culture can improve attainment in maths and English.

CREATIVITY IN YOUR OWN SCHOOL

Many primary teachers are skilled creative practitioners, and keen for creativity to occupy an important place within their school. Here are eight ways of marshalling that enthusiasm, supporting your teachers and boosting your school's creative provision.

1. IDENTIFY KEY STAFF

Let the whole school know that you're looking at revising your creative provision and find out who might have an interest in this. Those colleagues with relevant expertise and skills can then help you with the steps below, ensuring that any resulting changes aren't simply imposed from the top down. Don't forget to involve your TAs and support staff, and consider bringing a parent representative on board.

2. MAKE CREATIVITY PART OF YOUR SCHOOL ETHOS

Is creativity something you intend to value as a school? Do you wish to see it become an integral part of your provision? If so, make this commitment clear. Decide what creative learning will look like at your school, both in terms of dedicated arts lessons and the building of creative skills into other academic subjects. Once this is agreed, devise a brief statement that sets out this commitment clearly and refer back to it over the course of your planning.

3. ANALYSE YOUR CURRENT OFFER

Who does what? How do they do it? How successful are they? Out of the creative learning sessions that have already been planned and resourced, which can be shared with the relevant key stage? Which practices might you need to re-work, improve or replace with something better? What ideas do your staff have that might need some support to get off the ground? Empower those staff to present their ideas and give them the assistance they need.

4. SET ASIDE RESOURCES

This could be a tricky one, given current circumstances, but one solution might be to set up a single 'creative space'. Similar to how sports halls support PE teaching, this can serve as an area that's regularly booked out for different classes to use at different

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times, thus preventing resources from being spread unevenly throughout the school.

I've often put out calls for resource donations from staff and parents, and our reception knows that we operate an 'accept anything' policy when it comes to donations. It's amazing what you can sometimes find in a random bag of items. Put together a general list of items you're likely to need frequently, such as card, fabric, yogurt pots and egg cartons, which can be sent home periodically, thus encouraging donations to be made throughout the year.

PTAs can be drafted in to help with focused fundraising, and businesses in your local area will often be happy to help with donating resources. The Arts Council doesn't provide funding to schools, but it does fund public libraries, museums and individual applications for projects that your school might ultimately be able to access. Get in touch with the education officers at your local galleries and museums and find out what they can offer you.

5. PARTNER WITH PARENTS AND LOCAL CREATIVES

Thanks to the parent body at my daughter's school I now know an illustrator, a silversmith, a boat designer and a furniture maker – and those are just the people I've met. Who else might there be? Who are the people that make up your students' families, and what might they be able to offer?

6. WORK ACROSS SCHOOLS

The model of one teacher working across several schools is one that's often used by primaries and MATs for certain specialist subjects, such as languages. Could there be space in the budget for a primary art, drama or music teacher who may be able to teach while the class teacher uses their PPA time?

7. TRY SOMETHING NEW

The Children's Laureate, author Cressida Cowell, is currently championing an initiative called 'Free Writing Friday', where students are given time and freedom to write whatever they wish, without it being marked. The idea is to encourage their creative imaginations by allowing them to go with their ideas wherever they may lead, temporarily freed from having to worry about their spelling and punctuation.

8. TRAIN YOUR STAFF

From books such as *Teaching Primary Art and Design* by Emily Gopaul, to organisations such as The National Society for Education in Art and Design (nsead.org) and their related training, make sure your staff know where to get backup from the wider community of art teachers and practitioners.

Taken together, these pointers should help to either kick-start or strengthen your arts provision, while helping prepare your students for a future in which the ability to approach any number of situations creatively will likely give them the edge.



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