

## Skills-Based, Creative Curriculum

### History

In January 2009, a Curriculum Development Adviser was appointed to suggest, implement and oversee curriculum developments at Polam Hall Junior School. The initial remit was to consider how to facilitate more effective cross-curricular links, particularly at Key Stage 2. After much research and discussion, it was decided that a move towards a skills-based, creative curriculum was appropriate.

### Our Pupils

Children in Year 6 in 2008-09 were asked what they thought they should learn at school:

- 'I like it when it's hands-on.'
- 'You remember more when you find it out for yourself.'
- 'We should be learning about Barack Obama.'
- 'I want to learn about interviews because that's what I'll need for university and to get a job.'
- 'What English and Maths will I need if I want to be an animal conservationist?'

*Excellence and Enjoyment* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003, Foreword)

*Excellence and Enjoyment* states that 'Children learn better when they are excited and engaged – but what excites them best is truly excellent teaching, which challenges them and shows them what they can do.' (Foreword)

It also recommends that schools 'take a fresh look at their curriculum, their timetable and the organisation of the school day and week, and think actively about how they would like to develop and enrich the experience they offer their children.' (page 12)

These recommendations were acted upon and the following areas were debated in weekly meetings involving the Junior School staff.

### What is Creative Learning?

- It is long term and collaborative.
- It demands a joint commitment, a shared vision and a willingness to embrace open-ended outcomes, challenge and risk.
- It helps to equip young people with the skills, ability, confidence and attitudes to enable them to work creatively and to transfer and apply knowledge in different contexts towards new and valuable goals.
- It encourages creative, critical and reflective thinking and produces excited, enthusiastic, enquiry-driven learners.

(Creative Partnerships: *First Findings*, 2005)

### Key Characteristics of Creative Learning

- Imagination
- Flexibility
- Curiosity
- Independence
- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Trust in our own senses
- An ability to work on several ideas / address problems in different ways

Creative learning encourages a climate for young people to explore how to apply their knowledge in original ways and with purpose.

### The Curriculum at Present

- National Curriculum Programmes of Study (subject knowledge, skills and content) and Level Descriptions PLUS Religious Education & PSHCE;
- EYFS & Primary Frameworks;
- the need to root the curriculum within the principles of ‘Every Child Matters’ (2005) – enable children to ‘be healthy’, ‘stay safe’, ‘enjoy and achieve’, ‘make a positive contribution’, ‘achieve economic well being’;
- the need to begin to prepare for the implementation of Rose’s recent proposals (which might, of course, not be adopted should Labour be defeated in a General Election).

It was felt that a balance has to be achieved between ‘what we are learning’ and ‘what we have made’ (the content of the curriculum) and ‘how we have learned’ and ‘how might we use this in our daily lives?’ (the processes).

**IN ORDER TO PROVIDE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR CREATIVE LEARNING WHILST MAINTAINING STANDARDS, AND WITHOUT JEOPARDISING EITHER, WE DECIDED TO MOVE TOWARDS A SKILLS-BASED CURRICULUM.**

### Questions We Considered

- Why do we want to make changes?
- What sort of adults will we need in the year 2020?
- What skills and abilities will they need?
- What is in our curriculum that is not already relevant?
- What is likely to become less relevant as time passes?
- What are our aims?

The work of Ros Wilson was influential in our thinking:

‘The pupils we educate need to become active, informed, creative and intelligent learners. They should have full awareness of their own intelligences and those of others they need to interact with. They should know how they can influence and shape their own lives and those of others...learners should develop a sense of well-being and an eagerness to support and sustain the well-being of their community and the wider community.’

(Ros Wilson: *Planning and Organising the Creative Curriculum*)

### What are the Core Skills?

- Communication
- Application of number
- IT
- Working with others
- Improving own learning and performance
- Problem solving
- Thinking skills
- Information processing skills
- Reasoning skills
- Enquiry skills
- Creative thinking skills
- Evaluation skills

These skills should NOT be subject-based BUT **transferable**.

‘In schools young people need to articulate for themselves what they have learned, make explicit links between different areas of experience, and reflect on how something from one area can be applied to another...Transferable skills are sometimes not transferred simply because their relevance to new areas of learning has not been thought through...This is why it is crucial that the school’s common objectives are woven through all subjects, that teachers see themselves as teachers of language, thinking, culture and values as well as of science or history...’

(Dr. Nicholas Tate, TES, March 2006)

### **Skills-Based, Creative Curriculum Rationale**

The headmistress and staff of Polam Hall Junior School want the curriculum that we offer to be:

- based upon key skills - communication, application of number, IT, working with others, improving own learning and performance, problem solving, creative thinking, information processing, reasoning, enquiry, evaluation;
- meaningful – through relevant and clear cross-curricular links (tenuous links will not be made simply for the sake of making links);
- a complete picture rather than pieces of a jigsaw puzzle – the whole to be more than just the sum of the parts;
- challenging – including open-ended challenges with no right answers;
- fresh;
- innovative;
- stimulating;
- fun;
- memorable.

We want to:

- shape our curriculum to meet the needs of our children;
- give our children the confidence to tackle what, at first, seems difficult;
- encourage our children to recognise that sometimes there is not one right answer;
- help our children realise that there might be many different ways to arrive at ‘an answer’;
- stimulate our children’s natural curiosity and to give them the confidence to be curious;
- allow our children to take risks;
- Promote the 6 Rs- resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness, recollection, responsiveness, responsibility;
- teach our children skills that they are going to need in the future rather than content that they are unlikely to need to recall (eg. name the six wives of Henry VIII in the right order);
- teach skills through what interests our children – Essential Learning Experiences/’WOW Days!’ at the beginning of every theme will enable teachers to follow what inspires their pupils;
- involve our children in decision-making about their learning, allowing children choice and independence –

Tell me and I forgot,  
Show me and I remember,  
Involve me and I understand;

- closely monitor and assess progression in attainment and application of skills;
- help our children to transfer skills between different areas of the curriculum in order to encourage flexibility and resourcefulness and to enable them to use their strengths in one area to overcome challenges in another – to overcome ‘I can’t’ and ‘I don’t get it’;

- ensure our children are active, motivated and enthusiastic learners;
- focus on the depth and quality of the experience, not the quantity of the content delivered;
- ensure our children know what they are learning and WHY;
- allow time to engage, reflect and review – including peer and self-evaluation;
- take into account recent educational developments – eg. Rose Review;
- use a wealth of relevant resources – in classrooms, outdoors, in the local community and the wider area, including visits and visitors;
- allow our children to demonstrate their learning in different ways – not always pages in an exercise book but photographs, posters, products, presentations, performances...

‘An effective curriculum would enable all pupils to feel that they are gifted and talented and that they have some flexibility to choose their own learning pathways’  
(Ros Wilson)

### **Skills-Based, Creative Curriculum Aims**

#### **OUR MAIN AIMS ARE TO PROMOTE:**

- the development and application of the range of core skills across all curriculum areas: communication, application of number, IT, working with others, improving own learning and performance, problem solving, creative thinking, information processing, reasoning, enquiry, evaluation;
- creativity – to encourage imaginative and original thinking;
- exciting and challenging learning opportunities, using the children’s curiosity as a stimulus when appropriate;
- the confidence to ‘have a go’, develop self-belief and value their own and others’ ideas;
- choice and decision making when working independently and collaboratively;
- hypothesis, investigation, research and reflection.

#### Dimensions Skills Ladder

The Dimensions Creative Curriculum Design Toolkit was purchased in order to enable us to redesign our curriculum effectively. The Toolkit includes a Skills Ladder which

‘provides comprehensive and clear coverage of skills by subject and by year group from Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 6. It is based upon the Early Years Foundation Stage and National Curriculum Programmes of Study. It ensures there is a clear focus on developing transferable, permanent skills. This means that teaching and learning can be directed towards processes as well as outcomes.’

(Elaine Sutton Senior consultant, Unipace)

Therefore, the Skills Ladder:

- will help us to focus on permanent, transferable skills;
- provides coverage of skills by subject and year group;
- is arranged into Foundation Stage’s Areas of Learning and those proposed by Rose to aid cross-curricular linking;

- will be used to inform planning through identifying and tracking which key skills could be learned, consolidated or applied and assessed;
- will enable us to ensure continuity and progression;
- also provides a set of lifelong learning skills and skills grouped under headings imagination with purpose, originality & value (key creative elements)

Within any subject, pupils should be taught the following processes:

- how to speculate or develop a hypothesis
- how to collect evidence
- how to experiment or investigate
- how to observe and draw conclusions
- how to see things from different perspectives
- how to improve or suggest improvements for their work
- how to record or present their learning outcomes
- how to use their learning to extend learning or develop a new hypothesis
- how to achieve outcomes through working alone, as a pair and as a member of a group

### Assessment

‘the process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using and communicating information about a child’s progress and achievement during the development of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes.’ (*Dimensions Creative Curriculum Handbook*, p47)

‘Assessment’ comes from ‘assidere’ meaning ‘to sit beside’. It is:

- a partnership between teachers and learners;
- a partnership between teaching and learning;
- not threatening but useful;
- not ‘what can’t you do’ but ‘what can you do’;
- not simply ‘a test’ at the end but ongoing.

### How Our Children are Assessed

- Teacher observation
- Questioning and discussion
- Children’s work – exercise books, paper, posters, oral presentations, performances, photographs, videos
- Self-assessment
- Peer assessment
- Formal assessments ( e.g. half-termly written assessments, GL Assessment, PIPS)