

Case Study 10: Creative Collaborations

St Joseph's Academy, Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire

This case study describes the development of creative working practices, and the work involved in creating a new department formed by combining the departments of Art, Technical and Home Economics.

The department open night exemplified what the people involved had achieved and were celebrating with friends and visitors. The displays of work were stimulating and of the highest quality. Staff and pupils worked well together to talk guests through the work in progress and the ethos of educational achievement and partnership pervaded the whole proceedings. The whole event was lively and there was ample evidence of creative working and collaboration of the most significant order.

St Joseph's Academy is a denominational comprehensive school in East Ayrshire Council area. The school merged with St Conval's High School in October 1998 and the enlarged St Joseph's serves pupils on both sites. Some five years ago the school decided to combine the departments of Art, Technical and Home Economics and form a new department of Art, Design and Technology. This move was stimulated largely by the realisation that with curriculum developments, particularly in the 5–14 programme, there was a degree of overlap and duplication in their work, notably with regard to the design process. It was seen as important to reduce the loading at S1 and S2 as well as to provide the staff of three small departments with the benefits of a larger departmental team and more focused management. Staffing circumstances also worked in favour of the move with some staff moving on or retiring. John Grant the existing Principal Teacher of Art was appointed new departmental head after an interview that attracted a lot of interest because of the faculty or multidisciplinary approach, which was not common at that time.

It certainly was a challenge I was ready for. I had been PT for a number of years and this seemed like a move which would take me further in my own professional development. It was also a natural development with regard to art and design work in particular given the way the curriculum was shaping up.

The strategy followed by senior management at the school was to devolve a significant level of responsibility to the department head. Under his guidance the new department developed at its own pace with collaborative working out of solutions to problems associated with management and organisation as well as approaches to learning and teaching. This process involved a high level of confidence and trust on the part of senior staff and a real commitment taking a risk on what was a fairly unknown practice. The leadership of the new departmental head was pivotal to the gradual blending of the new departmental team. The recruitment of some new staff committed to the principles of multidisciplinary working also helped reinforce the development

of new attitudes and approaches.

The department comprises a head and two depute heads of department, with specialist staff comprising four art, four design technology, 2.6 home economics and two technicians.

In a situation like ours the importance of good personal relationships and committed professionalism on the part of staff are vital. A lot of time was spent in the early days simply talking things through and dealing with our shared fears and problems. I have been very fortunate in the quality of my colleagues. As a department we not only work effectively together but we like each other as people our friendships are real and go beyond the workplace.

John Grant

The work of the department was centred on a problem-solving approach with design at its core. The first area the new team worked on was the harmonising of the design process so that a common approach was followed across the subject areas. The RIPE structure was agreed.

R – Research and Investigation
I – Ideas
P – Planned solution
E – Evaluation

This agreement meant that from the outset in S1 pupils in all three subject areas were introduced to the design process at an early stage and the language used and pupil expectations were harmonised across classrooms and subjects.

This agreement established the basis of shared working and understanding. It made us consider fundamentally what we were about and forced us to share professional practice. Departmental meetings go beyond bean counting to consider pedagogical matters and we value our own peer evaluations as essential to improving the quality of experience and the attainment of our pupils. When the school introduced staff development and review approaches this was no threat to us – we were already into that in a big way and reaping the rewards of agreed practice.

Interviews with pupils and staff reinforce the significance of the extended teamwork that characterises the department.

Colleagues in other schools sometimes have difficulty in appreciating the tremendous benefits we get from working collaboratively in this way. It certainly is a change from past practice but I would not want to work any other way. There is great strength from shared teaching in everything from planning and research to actual course delivery and ways of working with the pupils. We all feel valued and that we are making a difference.

Stephen Duff, design technology teacher

I love being in this department. It feels like a community of artists working together. From the earliest time I committed myself to art and design coursework I have been aware of the support for me from the teachers. They work so well together. If I need help within my art course on say some computer-related matter I simply go to the craft and design teacher who I know understands what my art course is about.

There is lots of challenge in the work of the department but there is no significant competition between the people. We talk to each other about our work and share ideas.

Kirsty, S6

S1 and S2 pupils experience a cross-curricular design project for a term as part of their coursework in the three subject areas. The S2 project takes the form of a design brief to plan a fast food restaurant and involves all aspects of the design process with design briefs for aspects such as chairs, tables and lighting and menus.

It's great fun and it's real things that you have to do. It makes you work together in teams and teaches you how to research and to come up with answers which will really work. It also makes you look more closely at the real world.

Nicholas and Danielle, S2

The developing team-working skills that are established in S1 and S2 are progressed more informally in S3 to S6. It is noticeable how well the pupils support and encourage each other in coursework and how the team gradually changes to one of staff and pupils working together on work for SQA qualifications. Senior pupils now undertake costume and scenery design for school shows and productions. These are seen as tasks for teams of pupils who refer to staff for advice but not direction. Pupils spend evenings and weekends on these and personal projects and are committed to achieving the best for themselves and the school community. In these working relationships criticism and shared evaluation are viewed as positive and valuable with active exploration of ways to help individuals develop their creativity in line with their personal needs and ambitions. Responsibilities for pupils are real with targets for developing work being set by pupils in agreement with staff. Goal setting is monitored and generally achieved. Similar approaches are taken to homework tasks that are generally set as agreements to develop work in progress rather than new unsupported activity.

The resulting work produced by pupils is often of outstanding quality and display of pupils' efforts is a high departmental priority. Displays are regularly changed to reflect work in progress. The school has invested in frames and display cases so that the work of the department can be appreciated throughout the building especially in social areas. Good use is made of original artwork in every medium and also of photography both still and video.

I remember when I saw the work of senior pupils on display when I was in third year I thought that I could never achieve those standards. It can be a tough slog but that was the evidence that it was possible for me achieve if I applied myself.

Andrew, S6

Another interesting aspect of the department is the frequency with which former pupils contact staff to share ideas and developments from the wider world of work and further study.

For St Joseph's Academy taking a calculated risk in setting up a faculty approach has paid off. The results particularly in art and craft and design show this. Last year 17 pupils were presented for Higher art and all passed with 15 passes at A and two at B. Working for advanced Higher has taken on new dimensions with senior pupils blending craft and design and art qualifications to develop a rounded portfolio of skills for further study.

I want to do a degree in product design engineering at Glasgow University and as well as developing my art to Advanced Higher I have done a crash Higher in craft and design. The two subjects complement each other although they are different and the easy cross-over between the two in this school will help me towards a better preparation for my future studies.

Kirsty, S6

Craft and design is now an area of rapidly developing attainment in its own right with the art and craft and design areas attracting academic youngsters keen to enter the challenging world of design.

Of course we have not cracked it all. We need to work on embracing home economics more effectively in our structure but we have ideas there including the development of linked textile work involving art and HE as well as the possibility of some new course development in HE. The good thing is that we are committed to working through the problems and coming up with answers that will benefit our pupils.

John Grant

In working together in a team creative working practices have arisen that have reduced duplication across former departments and focused work more precisely. The effective collaboration, respect and commitment modelled by the staff is known to the pupils and is formative in developing their creativity and positive attitudes. The results in terms of academic attainment, creative output and application to work are plain to see in everything from the SQA results and the high quality of pupils' work to the numbers of children expressing an interest in the subject areas offered by the department.

In this department a number of key indicators of creative practice are illustrated.

- All pupils have planned opportunities to develop and apply their creativity abilities.
- Pupils are expected to apply higher-order skills (such as team working) as well as basic techniques (such as use of a computer package) to worthwhile contexts for creativity.
- Pupils are given opportunities to develop and consolidate their creativity in school outside normal lesson times.
- Pupils are keen to develop their higher-order skills and value the teaching and learning opportunities that they receive.
- Pupils are prepared to take the initiative in applying creativity to relevant tasks.
- Pupils are motivated to persevere with challenging tasks.
- Pupils are encouraged to explore a range of ideas, consider their quality and apply solutions accordingly.

Teaching for creativity

- A climate of enthusiasm and pleasure in learning is fostered and valued.
- Non-threatening and positive teaching approaches are marked by an understanding and acceptance that pupils making mistakes is an important part of the learning process.
- Pupils are confident and secure in classroom management arrangements and follow acceptable patterns of interaction and behaviour.
- Display is effective and clearly values the efforts of pupils.
- Open-ended questions and problems are set for pupils.
- Pupils and staff receive regular and coordinated feedback.
- Procedures are in place for staff to comment on pupils' progress in applying skills and approaches associated with creativity.
- Teachers use their knowledge to feed back regularly to pupils on progress and in setting expectations of development and improvement.
- Schemes of work and programmes of study show planned progression in the skills associated with creativity and continuity in the opportunities to apply these skills.
- Liaison between the sectors at school level promotes continuity and shared understanding regarding the nurturing of a creative dimension to the learning experience.
- A rising percentage of pupils display 'creative' attitudes, skills and concepts.
- A rising percentage of pupils are identified as developing and applying creativity attributes at an earlier age.
- A rising percentage of pupils gain qualifications that involve demonstration of creativity.

Managing for creativity

- The overall policy of the department includes aims and values in respect of creativity.
- All staff know and support the principles embodied in the policy statement

in respect of creativity.

- The headteacher, senior managers and the school board are explicit in their support for this dimension of the department's policy.
- Programmes of study and schemes of work mention teaching and learning activities, which provide for progression in developing creativity and the continuity of opportunity to develop creative skills and experiences.
- Funding is allocated to implement creativity developments.
- Systems are in place for monitoring the implementation of the creativity elements, evaluating the effectiveness of strategies that are being employed, for reviewing policies and approaches, programmes of study and schemes of work.

Sustaining creativity in learning and teaching

- Realistic expectations are set by and for senior and skilled teaching staff that take account of current curricular demands.
- Such staff are allowed to provide effective models of teaching/are involved in strategies for disseminating good practice.
- Such staff have the explicit support of the headteacher and other senior staff.
- An adequate amount of time is made available to staff to develop the creative aspects of learning experience and is also provided by staff to the pupils.
- Staff provide an agreed base of opportunity for pupils and are allowed to develop their own confidence for creativity activities.
- Support in classrooms is available to those who are building their skills and knowledge.
- Agreed targets are set for developing the creativity element in day-to-day learning and teaching.
- Staff *believe* that the development of creativity is a key aspect of the curriculum and incorporate recommended approaches into their teaching.