

Case Study 2: Whole School Policy on Learning and Teaching – Sustaining Creativity

Gylemuir Primary School, Edinburgh, City of Edinburgh

This case study describes how creative working and leadership from management has been used to develop and take forward a learning and teaching policy that underpins the work in all areas of the curriculum.

The best thing about this school is they treat you like people and not like children. They listen to what you have to say.

Robert and Leah, P6c

Gylemuir Primary School on the western outskirts of Edinburgh is large, modern and well-equipped. An early years extension, opened in 2000, was recently added to the building. The school roll stands at 540 pupils with an additional nursery complement of over 90 children organised in four half-day classes. Liz Gordon, the headteacher, has been in post for two years. The school buzzes with purposeful activity and there are very impressive displays of pupils' work throughout the building. A very professional and stimulating welcome to the school by staff and pupils is enhanced by the computer-generated whiteboard display in the foyer. This changes daily and uses pupils' work including digital photographs, scanned-in art and other presentation material as well as notifications of events and items of interest for the school community and visitors. Classrooms are bright, lively and well organised with imaginative use made of available space. It is in this climate that high quality creative work on the part of both teachers and pupils is initiated and developed. This work marks the school as an exciting place in which to learn and teach.

The school has a comprehensive learning and teaching policy that underpins the work in all aspects of the curriculum. This policy is the result of staff collaboration and development over time and has helped to sustain creative working. A number of key features can be identified in that it:

- provides a basic rationale that good teaching makes a difference
- invites judgement of school effectiveness by the way in which agreed aims are realised in the everyday experience of the pupils
- demands that classroom time must be well spent
- asserts that learning should be ordered and progressive and take place in an atmosphere of warmth and shared purpose
- outlines agreed classroom management and organisation arrangements
- insists that there is personal value for all involved at every level in the school and its community.

The school has gone beyond the general overarching aims statement and set out a clear set of very specific teaching aims to:

- facilitate a self-evolving approach to assimilating and sharing new and innovative approaches to learning and teaching
- capitalise upon and disseminate good practice amongst staff

- maximise attainment in the classroom by meaningfully involving pupils in their education (through sharing aims and self-assessment)
- encourage staff to reflect upon and evaluate their own teaching and identify successful approaches and next steps to enhance the learning and teaching process
- monitor standards of teaching and learning across the curriculum to provide a focus for raising attainment.

In realising these aims, classroom organisation and the processes of teaching draw heavily on recent research in areas such as accelerated learning and multiple intelligences as well as on the experience of staff. Approaches are defined where:

- expectations of pupils are not limited or affected by preconceptions and there is recognition that intelligence is not of one kind or of a fixed potential. Classroom organisation is varied to meet different learning styles, including attention to visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning
- positive feedback to pupils is regular so as to motivate real and frequent success in schoolwork. This includes frequent and individualised praise and support as well as class and group discussion of meeting targets, and success in all areas of school life at individual and school community levels
- pupils are given a sense of wellbeing both physical and emotional through the nurturing of positive self-images, working with others, building constructive relationships – and developing emotional intelligence. The link between *learning to learn* and the association with *learning to be* is a key plank of the school's *raison d'être*
- learning experiences are designed to be challenging yet manageable with the curriculum differentiated to meet needs of individual pupils
- pupils are encouraged to work hard and be well organised with strategies such as a special mention book, P6/P7 wall of fame, multimedia display in school entrance, effective wall display and class, group and individual feedback sessions.

Building on the shared understanding that good teaching does indeed make a difference the expectations of the professional members of staff are agreed and practised by teachers. Staff aim for:

- consistency and fairness with an emphasis on predictable teacher behaviour and honesty with a firm and good discipline approach geared to create a context in which the creative and even eccentric pupils can be appreciated
- the setting of achievable targets with a basic expectation of realising excellence
- clarity and purposefulness so that all activities have a meaning and purpose which is explained to pupils. The place of activities within a longer-term plan or series of lessons is made clear as part of everyday teaching
- openness and accessibility with an overt valuing of pupils' opinions in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Pupils obtain these views not only through discussion but also through regular evaluation of activities and lessons.

These are not cosmetic exercises and the results are used to develop knowledge of pupils and to aid differentiation in teaching

- promotion of a positive working environment and an ethos of achievement by constantly emphasising pleasure, enthusiasm and enjoyment as essential features of learning and teaching.

Our national test results have gone through the roof this year. Creativity and attainment are not separate – creative approaches, fun and challenging contexts are major contributory factors to improved attainment.

Liz Gordon, Headteacher

Staff aim for a balance in methodology and approaches although central to all is the promotion of the child as an independent thinker and learner. Debate and discussion are promoted and valued.

You always have those who choose to differ; they are what make it exciting. There is debate and exchange – it beats the days of staff discussion where nobody spoke and the only signs of activity were the furtive glancings at watches.

Liz Gordon, Headteacher

Differentiation is carefully considered on a variety of levels by outcome, task, pace, level of completion and degree of support.

Creativity is actively fostered but is supported in practical ways through the development of stimulating classroom environments, easy access to necessary and appropriate resources including those for ICT and the use of a range of computer applications by both staff and pupils.

ICT offers enormous possibilities for creative development. Arising from our development plan we hope to set up an I-movie club next year where children will make mini-movies using computers and digital cameras. A class teacher has taken on the role of 'Webmaster', in setting up our school website. The AHT, Greg, together with some pupils is currently working to produce a virtual tour of the school for the website. He has also got us involved in a European Comenius project which will involve our children writing and swapping stories with children in other parts of Europe using multimedia as well as print. We hope to combine this with a writer in residence in the school to further enrich the experience by involving children, the parents and the wider school community. Our vision would be that perhaps adults and children could become involved in joint workshops, in much the same way as our dance workshops, so that children and adults can collaborate on producing something together.

Katy, AHT

Day-to-day classroom layout is a consideration for all teachers in ensuring that the proposed activity and the way of working are matched. Such is the store placed by the school on ensuring continuity and consistency in these

matters that all classrooms have organisational/information charts that are laminated and desktop-sized so that temporary staff have a clear picture of classroom expectations and important people to contact for advice and help. Posters outlining key processes and routines to be followed are also available. New and probationary staff members are thoroughly inducted and space is made for discussion with planned personal development opportunities including visits to and work shadowing in other schools, being harmonised with a very good local authority probationer support scheme.

Planning is carefully arranged so as to be thorough but not overburdensome. There are some key features that enhance the approaches used for individual classes including:

- collaborative year group planning to ensure breadth and balance
- block plans to ensure next steps in teaching and learning across the curriculum
- effective cluster school planning particularly on collaborative initiatives such as the development of an ICT policy, and also on shared creative initiatives such as the P6 Digidance project.

Putting fun and enjoyment into the challenge of everyday teaching introduces us as teachers to a whole palette of possibilities. You get it in discussion with staff and pupils, it shines through in pupils' writing and teachers' planning and provokes all kinds of response when new dimensions are introduced like having dancers, authors, artists, rangers and other outside people in to work with the children. Our staff and pupil evaluations bear this out.

Katy, AHT

However, the school's programme of continuous professional development is central to the school's progress and development and makes a fundamental contribution to the school's profile as an example not only of creativity in action but of primary education at its best.

Staff development has been at the heart of everything that we have done. To get that into place we needed a structure and a plan which was understood and agreed by everyone. The appointment of one of my AHTs as staff development coordinator was vital in the organisation and coordination of activities.

I saw tremendous potential in the very considerable individual talents of my staff but we needed to pull together as a unit. Staff development and review helped in identifying people's strengths with a view to capitalising and promoting these strengths but it was also about exploiting their capacity for professional leadership. I was able to involve many of the staff in planning and delivering in-service [training]. As a result the programme was enlivened and enriched and for them there was the satisfaction and professional development of being involved and taking responsibility for each other's development. Of course, the main beneficiaries were the pupils in terms of ideas for development and the spreading of new and effective teaching

strategies.

Liz Gordon, Headteacher

The school also developed interesting ways of sharing good practice including establishing a staff development library collection and giving the staff the opportunity to share good practice and to take part in quality professional discussion.

We also asked ourselves why we had not adopted our high level of classroom thinking with regard to creating effective classroom contexts and accelerated learning techniques to our own staff development situation? We decided that all our main staff development sessions should be held in the atrium of our new wing to give us light and atmosphere. We moved in the comfortable staff room furniture, provided background music, refreshments and water. We set up fixed small group sharing sessions as ice breakers and adopted a culture-café style approach with tables arranged to accommodate small groups of four to encourage all to participate. Now there is shared responsibility for organising events and most INSET is advertised and structured in advance and not simply when we have guest participants from other schools. It is so much more professional and worth making the effort in terms of outcomes. In-service [training] times are special and enjoyable so much so on whole day sessions we even begin with a breakfast experience with coffee, croissants and the works!

Liz Gordon, Headteacher

Use of digital photography to further record and share practice underlines the school policy to document work effectively. A growing number of staff regularly illustrate their forward plans and record keeping with digital photographs, bringing to life what might otherwise be plain text. Shared experience and digital photographic display of pupils' work has been enhanced with the purchase of an A3 printer to give large-scale picture reproduction.

Time is made available for staff to be released from classes to undertake development. In this past year much of this has been stimulated by cluster school developments in ICT, science and modern languages. Schools pay for this through devolved budgets and the resultant guidelines and support materials have been of the highest quality.

We have tried to overcome the pressures of a development agenda imposed from outside the school which could dominate our priorities by adopting the attitude that we can't afford whole days unpacking the latest released initiative. We focus on the learning and teaching implications at a strategic level and leave the unpacking to specialist groups at a later date. This way we can keep our agenda to the fore.

Liz Gordon, Headteacher

In this environment teachers are encouraged to experiment within the agreed framework of parameters and there is significant scope for them to identify

and adjust strategies to promote the school's objectives in learning and teaching. Co-terminus with this the creative learning potential of the pupils is stimulated and developed. As this and other case studies exemplify the momentum of learning and teaching is accelerated and enriched where creativity is encouraged and outcomes of the most interesting and significant kind can result.

The 2000–2001 arrangements at P6 exemplify the kinds of creative teaching and learning that can be unlocked through the stimulus of an organised and thought-provoking professional teaching context. These include the Digidance and John Muir projects.

Another school in the cluster, Corstorphine Primary had sought and achieved Scottish Arts Council Lottery Fund support to run a very significant community-based dance and interactive video project. Gylemuir was invited to participate and seized on the opportunity to enrich the delivery of key areas of the planned curriculum. This project involved around a thousand children in the cluster having experience of contemporary dance workshops led by professional dancers from the Dancebase Company. A significant feature was the involvement of parents and carers in community workshops for dance and video imaging to support the work in schools.

The workshops were brilliant because they involved parents and children together and they encouraged boys to lose their inhibitions. I think children were proud their parents supported them and I am so proud of them. There were 200 children on stage tonight. They were not directed or prompted and produced a performance that had me thinking and got me excited. There needs to be much more of this sort of thing in schools. You think you can't do it but you can when you try.

Jill Stevens, Corstorphine parent

The range of dance explored was wide and included Salsa, Hip Hop and also South African gum-boot dancing that was enlivened by the local firefighters who danced in fire boots with the children and adults.

The dancing was terrific, it was fun and we liked working with the Corstorphine children. Working with the computer and joining that with the dancing was really cool. We really were making something that no one had seen before.

Rebecca, Louisa and Rachel, P6 Gylemuir

Working with the dancers made you feel more special. They gave you lots of encouragement to try things you thought you couldn't do – but you could when you did them. It was great.

Tracy, Nicola and Rebecca, P6a

At the P6 stages in both Corstorphine and Gylemuir it was decided to experiment with the combination of both contemporary dance and video animation. The Harry Potter phenomenon was harnessed as a context for language, PE, ICT and music work as part of the planned curriculum. This

was the stimulus to get the children thinking about plots and scenarios for movement. From these considerations other themes like magic, team work and things not always being what they appear began to emerge and were then carried into the contemporary dance and video-animation sessions and developed by the children together with the dance tutor and the video artist. There was exploration of themes like friendship and collaboration, the influence of advertising and the power of communal decision making were developed further. From these ideas there developed dance and video workshops in which scenarios were created and these were then linked to form a series of performance sequences. The sequences were characterised by the interaction of a video-generated backcloth that conveyed a magical world, and the actual movement of children on stage. The children had key responsibility for devising the movement sequences and also generating the computer graphics for the back-projected video animations and images using a computer package under the guidance of the video artist from the Stills Gallery. The work was further enriched by an original music-scape commissioned by the project.

They worked in wee teams with some producing artwork, others scanning it and yet others animating it using the computer package. They were brilliant at it and used the medium as they would any other like paint or collage. They have surprised me with the originality of their ideas and the enormous change in attitude to dance. There is no question now about being slow to line up to go to dancing.

Pauline, P6 senior teacher, Gylemuir

The P6 element was run in parallel in both schools and involved careful joint planning, collaborative work by the pupils and of course a significant effort to join all the scenarios together in a performance in an Edinburgh theatre. The result, 'Digidance', was a startling success and a genuine arts event in its own right.

So often today children have their activities and adults have theirs. It was exhilarating to do something creative together with my two girls. This sort of experience gives me a new perspective on the children in terms of what they are capable of doing, and I think it gave them a new perspective on me. I felt the result of the P6 work in video and dance was an artistic entity in its own right and one of the highest quality.

Ulrika Al Hamiz, Corstorphine parent

As well as changed attitudes towards dance on the part of boys the staff have noticed a growth of confidence on the part of girls with ICT. The level of mixed-sex working collaboratively in both dance and video workshops was high and the possibility of this combination of arts and ICT for narrowing the gender gap in both these areas is one others might consider developing further.

Being able to collaborate with Angeline on the video and to work with the teachers has seen such a rich pool of ideas emerge – but when you add that to what the children bring you get something really exciting.

The family learning sessions have been so positive and add a whole new dimension to the work.

Jennifer Paterson, Dancebase tutor

The children are amazing; they are so in tune with the technology and so up to doing and experimenting. They have no fear and they work well collaboratively sharing knowledge. This made the pace of development quite fast. I have learnt loads of things I didn't know you could do with the software – they have taught me so much! You give them the basic principles of the programme and they do amazing things because they don't have my training and background hang-ups. Some of things have been like 'Whoa! That's so cool – How did you do that?' It has also been terrific fun.

Angeline Ferguson, video artist and animateur, Stills Gallery

Providing role models of creative collaborative working is important in the general ethos of learning at Gylemuir. Although they have worked together before, this school session saw increased collaborative working on the part of the three P6 class teachers.

We have drawn strength from capitalising on each other's experience and shared responsibility across the classes for delivering aspects of the planned curriculum. I have led all the science whilst Pauline has done all the IT work.

Peter, P6 teacher

This collaborative working has been well focused not only in the dance work but also in an environmental project involving the children in reclaiming a derelict area of ground and planning garden features to enrich the local environment. In this work they are in collaboration with the management of the Gyle shopping centre and they are using their efforts as part of an application by all 80 pupils for an award in recognition of their environmental improvements from the John Muir environmental award scheme. The children have been involved in researching the background to John Muir, including website searches, and have planned and designed garden features to enhance the piece of land in question. They have produced beautiful floral artwork and researched the indigenous plant life. Children have also sought the support of local business to turn their dreams into a reality. This initiative has been very much tied into a citizenship thrust to encourage the children to be active citizens and not only to become involved in things such as making choices but also to take action to make a difference.

People don't appreciate their environment – they throw rubbish about and neglect the plants. We want to keep the trees and put back some interesting plants. It has been good to work on this and the Digidance in teams – it has made us better friends.

Laura, Andrew, Sarah and Sean, P6b

Once again a key element of the work is to engage the community and develop communication through the production of posters, signs and the

recording of the work using digital cameras including video documentation with a view to putting the work on to the school's website. In this way skills developed earlier in the Digidance work are used and improved. The intention is that the next year's P6 will take the work further and develop more. In this way the children are building a stake in their community.

The pressure to deliver the performance indicator areas sometimes makes you feel guilty when you do these wider ranging projects. I can understand the pressures to achieve in these areas and also parental concerns that we demonstrate results. However the parents are also very keen on what goes on in the wider scene and tell us so at parents' nights. It is perhaps time that the balance of the narrow and wider educational agendas was evened up.

Pauline, P6 senior teacher

Gylemuir Primary has successfully created an ethos and organisational structure that promotes creativity in tandem with success in delivering the basic curriculum. There are a number of key factors at work.

- The management leads from the front and values the contributions and perspectives of the whole staff team, pupils and the community.
- The promotion of team working provides a role model to which pupils respond with enthusiasm.
- The school insists that fun and challenge are contributors to successful learning but has based its approaches on well researched, innovative thinking.
- In being prepared to undertake challenging work that pushes back the boundaries of primary practice, the school has succeeded in not only unlocking creativity but also improving attainment.
- Sharing the development of a learning and teaching policy and thinking-through procedures to ensure that staff follow them through has promoted and sustained creativity.
- By building the practice of creativity into staff development a further level of creative activity has been stimulated and creativity itself has been sustained for the future.

Extra quotations for commentary use.

We had a focus on dance last session but that was more about social and country dancing. This was different. The involvement of the dancers and other ways of considering dance and inventive movement has been liberating especially for the boys.

Peter, P6 teacher, Gylemuir