

# My Creative School Learning Resource

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

A selection of tools, case studies and writing based on the learning from a two-year partnership with primary schools across South London.



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The three parts of the My Creative School Learning Resource are available for download as individual sections or as one document here: [www.anewdirection.org.uk/mcslearningresource](http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/mcslearningresource)

## 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.



# **The Narrative of My Creative School**

How the arts can support schools

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# Introduction

## 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.



## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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 Feest, 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.

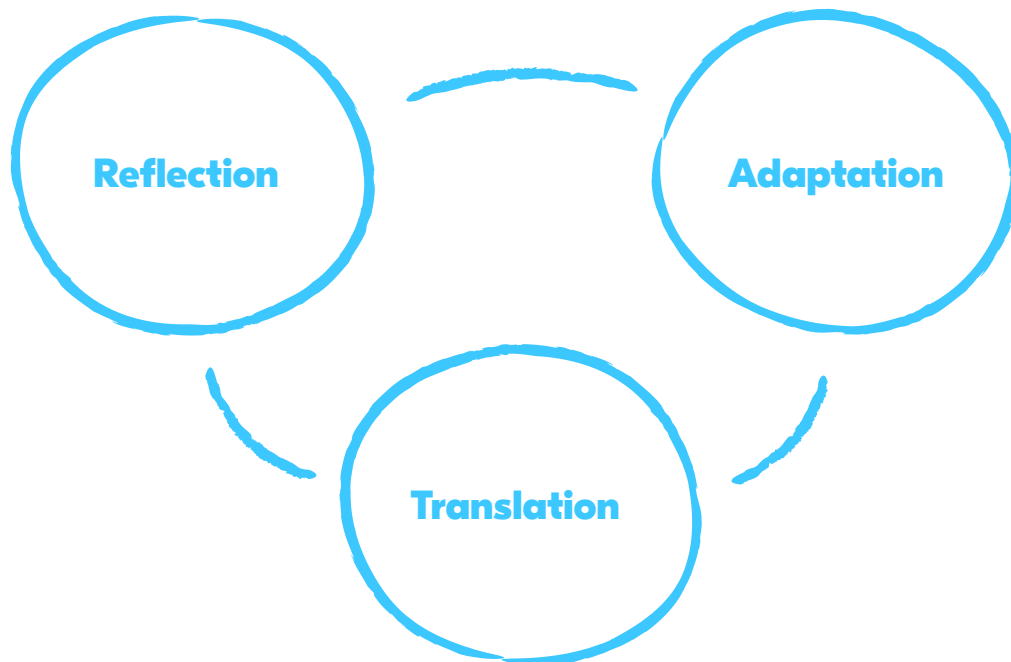
Could an arts-led approach to your school development priorities help achieve the change your school needs?

## 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.**

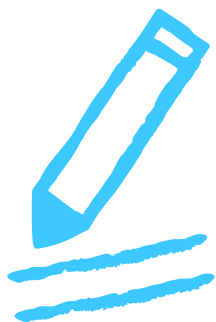


Creative practitioner

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

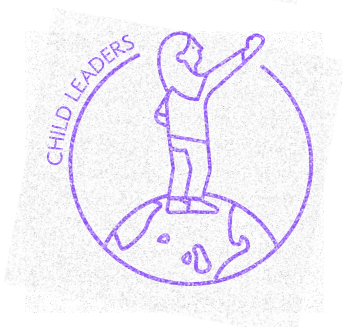
One thing I would tell a colleague to share what I've learned

# Compendium of Ideas

Tips, tools and case studies by  
teachers and creative practitioners

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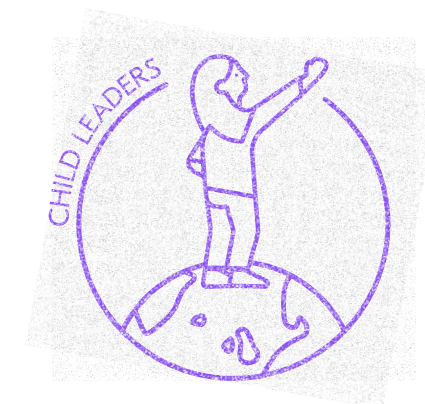


# Introduction

## In this resource

In this Compendium of Ideas you will find six teacher development and classroom ideas, contributed by the creative practitioners and teachers that took part in MCS. In each resource you will find a step-by-step list of activities and a case study of how these ideas have supported SDPs.

You will also find a lesson evaluation tool with activities and tips to reflect on your creative ideas and experiments.





## Using the arts to explore different curriculum areas

By Greg Klerkx  
(MCS creative advocate) and  
Alex McIntyre  
(Creative practitioner)

Use these teacher planning activities to help staff reflect on their teaching practice and develop their own arts-led approaches to curriculum challenges.

Visiting cultural venues is beneficial for teachers as well as for pupils. Exploring the passions and interests of staff during a visit to a museum or gallery can expand thinking, leading to the development of new arts-led approaches.

### I: INSET

#### Activity I: INSET warm-up – re-imagining an object

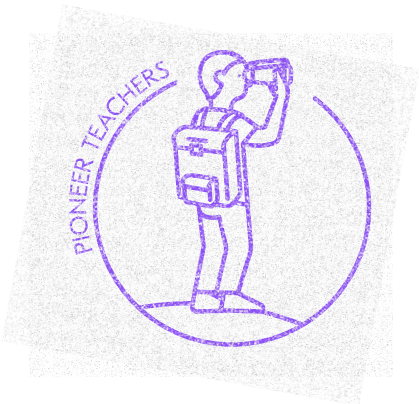
It helps to develop story muscles and is a light-hearted way to begin a staff meeting about creative learning.  
(10 minutes)

- Gather ordinary objects together.
- Participants sit in a circle and pass one of these objects from person to person.
- Individuals re-imagine the purpose and 'story' of the object. Useful questions to prompt imagination include "Whose is it?", "What is it?" and "Where does it come from?"

In this way, a rock becomes an aide to a magician or the toothpick of a giant. The longer you pass the object around, the more imaginative and unusual the suggestions become as participants gain confidence in expressing imaginative thought and move beyond more obvious ideas.



**Tip:** Use this storytelling activity with your pupils in class time.



### Activity 2: River

This activity explores teachers' own motivations and challenges using an alternative, visual method.

(20 minutes)

Individuals:

- On a large sheet of paper, using coloured pens, plot the journey of your teaching practice as though it is a river.
- Start with the source – what is your motivation for being a teacher?
- Map the journey of your practice from its source to now. How has it grown? What other experiences / tributaries have joined it? Where are the shoals, rapids or bits of dead water where you feel like you can't move forward?

Share your drawings in small groups. Use the below questions to facilitate discussion:

- What does your drawing express or reflect about your experience of teaching and learning?
- What values underpin your view of learning? Which key experiences influence this view?
- How do you currently use the arts / creativity in your teaching and learning?
- Which new insights can you identify through your river? In particular, where are your areas of challenge / risk?

### Activity 3: Quadrant

This activity supports teachers to identify a personal challenge – an alternative method to a strengths and weaknesses exercise.

(20 minutes)

Individuals each draw a quadrant on a sheet of paper. In the different quarters, map out and answer the following questions:

- What do you love about what you do?
- What don't you love?
- What do you feel you are good at?
- What would you like to do better?

In small groups, discuss the quadrants. What do you notice? Are there areas of common interest or challenge?

Individuals should each choose one area of interest/challenge to enhance, improve or change through an arts-led approach. This will be that teacher's personal challenge.

### Activity 4: Problem translation – turning your personal challenge into an enquiry question

Use this Problem Translator template during the INSET or individually to explore in detail your chosen challenge within a creative learning and/or enquiry-led framework.

(60 minutes)



**Tip:** You could introduce a competitive group element to see which group can generate the most potential solutions or explorations of a challenge.



**Cultural venues are receptive environments for teachers to explore new ways into their teaching practice**

Creative practitioner



<i>Problem</i>	<i>Example: Students don't pay attention during physics lessons and thus perform poorly</i>
<i>What they're really saying</i>	<i>The way physics is presented isn't engaging us, so we don't find it meaningful or valuable (Potential for multiple responses)</i>
<i>Impact</i>	<i>Low engagement, poor performance on tests</i>
<i>Question: your challenge</i>	<i>How can we find ways to interest students in physics?</i>
<i>Approaches</i>	<i>Explore movement and interactivity as a way to convey some key ideas (Potential for multiple responses)</i>

## 2: Visiting a cultural venue as a staff group to expand thinking

Choose a cultural venue such as a museum or art gallery to visit as a staff group. Cultural visits enable fresh stimulus for ideas and can help imagine new ways for the arts to impact on curriculum or teaching and learning challenges.

Individually, explore your chosen cultural venue:

- What exhibition, artwork, or physical space are you drawn to? What do you connect with and what inspires you? Why?
- Choose one thing you wish to look at in more detail. Spend time either drawing or writing about it.

In groups of two to four, share inspirations from the venue, responding to the following questions each time:

- What do you notice about your chosen inspiration? What drew you to it?
- How does your inspiration connect to your teaching?
- What learning activities would you like to devise and try as a result? Think small and experimental: something you could slip into a lesson to open up a new perspective.



**Tip:** Adapt this activity for your pupils during a visit to a local cultural venue.

As a group, reflect on what you notice about the activity – was anything surprising? Consider your challenge again, potentially over coffee or food to create a relaxed atmosphere.

- Using your thinking and experiences from your visit today, what new experimental action can you take to address your challenge? How will the arts be incorporated? What are you going to do? How can this be broken into smaller steps?
- When will you take these steps?
- What or who do you need to help you (resources / SLT / external input)?

## 3: Implementing and experimenting in class

Put your plan for a creative project into action – this may feel daunting but hold your nerve.

Reflect and process both individually and with a group of staff: what did you notice about how pupils responded?



**Tip:** Use the creative lesson evaluation activities later in this resource as a guide.

## Putting this idea into practice: Creative Catalyst case study

# How can arts-led curriculum approaches help build the skill and confidence of NQTs and grow a culture of peer leadership?

St. William of Perth Roman Catholic Primary School – Medway

By Greg Klerkx  
(MCS creative advocate)  
and Alex McIntyre  
(Creative practitioner)

## Project partners

Alex McIntyre (Creative practitioner)  
Greg Klerkx (MCS creative advocate)  
George Wilkins (NQT and Year 3 teacher)  
Laura Dormedy (NQT and Early Years/Foundation teacher)  
James Willis (Deputy Head Teacher)

## The Big Idea

Our aim was to build the skills and confidence of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in connecting arts-led learning with key school development priorities around writing. We wanted NQTs to be able to devise and deliver a whole staff INSET around new approaches in this area.

## Why?

St. William of Perth Roman Catholic Primary School (SWOP) noted that their children's progress in writing slowed from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, particularly compared to reading. The school believed that much of this challenge was a matter of engagement: too many pupils were not interested or lacked confidence in writing.

This project sought to equip NQTs George and Laura with the ability to create small arts-led interventions and to reflect on whether these improved writing engagement. By placing George and Laura at the centre of this 'up-skilling' process, the school hoped to build their confidence within the SWOP teaching team - positioning them as internal leaders for arts-led learning.



**Both writing and art are inherently visual forms that lend themselves well to connections for mutual benefit in teaching and learning**



MCS Creative Advocate

### What we did...

- Session 1: A half-day workshop led by Alex and Greg that explored George and Laura's interest in, and experience of, teaching and learning.
- Session 2: A full day at the Turner Contemporary, a gallery in Margate. We used a series of visual art and discussion activities to create our own connections between the visual and the written.
- Session 3: George and Laura were tasked with adapting one of the visit's activities into a small intervention they would then try with their class before our next session.
- Session 4: George and Laura co-delivered a two-hour INSET for the other 12 members of the SWOP teaching and senior leadership team, using ideas from our art-writing experimentation process. They used recorded sounds, images and objects as stimuli for writing, and then led brainstorming sessions about how other teachers could adapt these methods for the particular writing challenges their pupils were facing.

### What we learnt

A personalised training intervention with a clear process and goals can build confidence in individual teachers and NQTs that can then cascade to whole teaching teams.

When visiting cultural venues, have clear goals in mind as to where your exploration will ideally lead. In our case, we knew we wanted to find new ideas for engaging Foundation and KS1 pupils with writing and we believed visual art would be a potentially powerful way to do this.

School leadership must be willing and able to provide cover and planning time for teachers to engage in deep learning about their practice.



**(NQTs) have really moved forward with their teaching practice**



Deputy Head Teacher

# Channel the power of WOW in your school

By Alex McIntyre  
(Creative practitioner)

This set of activities will help teachers to collaboratively explore what makes learning "WOW"!

WOW lessons are exciting, engaging and conducive to independent thinking. WOW lessons originally responded to a desire for awe and wonder in teaching and learning at St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Bromley.

They took two forms:

- **WOW learning experiments:** small, engaging experiments for teaching a lesson of your choice, combining your own passions with consideration of the needs of specific children.
- **Wonder Days:** an extension of WOW learning experiments, taking place across a half/whole day of immersive activities.

## I: INSET

### Activity 1: Warm-up

This opening activity brings people together in an energising way.  
(5 minutes)

Split teachers into pairs.

- Standing facing each other, ask them to count up to three, taking it in turns so the numbers are passed between them, and repeat as a round until you say stop.

- Once they get the hang of this, they can introduce a sound or physical action for each number (one becomes a hum, two becomes a clap and so on). This should provoke laughter.



#### Tip:

This activity can be used with pupils as a lesson opener or during circle time.

### Activity 2: Defining WOW

(20 minutes)

Invite teachers to explore what WOW means to them.

- Individually, recount the story of a WOW learning moment in your own life, highlighting what was important about it.  
(5 minutes)
- In pairs or fours, share your examples with each other.  
(10 minutes)
- Group reflection: what does WOW mean to us as adults/teachers/children? Is it scary/loud/meaningful/quiet?  
(5 minutes)



### Activity 3: Focusing on your learners and their needs

This is a practical activity to support the visualisation of your pupils and their needs. You will need modelling clay or playdough. (15 minutes)

Individuals should create a model of a child in their class using playdough, making it symbolic rather than realistic to reflect: (10 minutes)

- What is this child like as a learner?
- What needs does s/he have?
- When does s/he currently demonstrate independent thinking and learning?
- What influences or obstructs this learning?

Return to the group (or split into small groups) and introduce your playdough children to each other: (5 minutes)

- What commonalities / differences do you notice?
- What would inspire WOW/awe and wonder in your child / these children?

### Activity 4: Design a WOW Experiment

(15 minutes)

Design at least one learning experiment by thinking about what you would love to teach and what you think would inspire awe and wonder for this child/children. Plan out:

- What will you do?
- When will you do it?
- What materials / support do you need?

## 2: Developing your ideas

Give staff one week following the INSET to think through and develop their ideas further.

Meet in pairs or year group teams to workshop each person's WOW experiment to ensure they are ready to deliver it. Be curious and suspend judgement to facilitate free discussion. Ask:

- What excites you about this?
- What is challenging and how will you address that challenge?

## 3: Small WOW learning experiments

Go and try out your planned experiments on your classes!



### Tip:

Use the lesson evaluation activities later in this resource to gauge how your pupils responded to your WOW learning experiments.



#### 4: Reflection: Follow-up evaluation

Following the WOW learning experiments, meet and reflect in the same pairs or year group teams as before. Use these questions to help facilitate your conversation:

- How did the experiments go?
- What happened?
- What did you notice?
- What were you excited about? Why?
- What felt more challenging? Why?
- Where would you like to take your thinking next?
- How could this become a bigger project?
- What opportunities and benefits can you see?
- What would help you expand your ideas further?

#### 5: Translation: Embedding the learning

How could your teachers expand their WOW learning experiments to embed their learning? Consider the differentiated options below:

- Plan a series of linked WOW learning experiments (one per week) over a specified period of time. Staff deliver and reflect on any changes they observe. This approach is particularly useful if you are aiming for long term change to address a problem.
- Plan a full scale Wonder Day – or make them a regular event.



**The teachers' ideas were full of wonder and highly experimental. Responses to this challenge were exciting and varied.**



Creative practitioner

## Putting this idea into practice: Creative Catalyst case study

# How can awe and wonder improve learning?

St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School – Bromley

By Alex McIntyre  
(Creative practitioner)

## Project partners

Alex McIntyre (Creative practitioner)  
Katharine James (Creative practitioner)  
Jane Burr (Class teacher)  
Sharon Grange (Head Teacher)  
All teaching staff

## The Big Idea

Through a creative exploration with all teaching staff, we experimented with ways of incorporating and evaluating the impact of WOW moments in learning.

## Why?

St Joseph's Primary School's most recent Ofsted report highlighted a need to develop children as independent thinkers and learners. Teachers observed a lack of engagement, focus and child-led learning across the school. The school decided that the ambition was to put the WOW back into learning for children – to capture attention, inspiration and imagination using the arts in non-arts curriculum subjects.

## What we did...

As a starting point, Alex facilitated a conversation with school leadership to identify a list of characteristics of independent learners. These became success indicators for the project:

- Curious and intrinsically interested in learning
- Excited about learning
- Able to listen
- Responsive and attentive
- Engaged
- Active, responsible learners
- Present
- Able to use vibrant language and ask questions

We felt that in order for these characteristics to occur, a child needed to experience a sense of awe and wonder. This led us to explore the questions:

- What is awe and wonder?
- Is the experience the same for everyone?
- How can we create the conditions for another person to experience this?

After an initial INSET session and two "Wonder Labs" to develop staff ideas, teachers delivered their own WOW learning experiments in class. They used feedback from these to run longer Wonder Days.

Wonder Days were ambitious class activities which were co-planned and co-delivered with the help and skills of a creative practitioner to develop and extend the learning of the WOW learning experiment. This led to exciting and engaging lessons across the curriculum, e.g.:

- Year 6 pupils experienced what it was like to work in the mines during the Victorian era in their history lesson. They pulled heavy loads on gym mat 'trucks' across the hall, crawled through a dark tunnel in one of the corridors (made from black bin liners) and crouched in boxes to get the sense of limited space and darkness.
- A Year 4 teacher led a WOW lesson to demonstrate a chemical reaction in digestion through a dramatic chemistry experiment. The experiment was filmed and showed audible gasps and amazed expressions across the whole class. The children went on to develop their own movements and actions for different chemical elements and created a rap song together.

### What we learnt

The teacher was very much the lead, with the creative practitioner providing encouragement for the teacher in stretching his/her own practice. This created a developmental opportunity for teachers, increasing the potential for ideas and skills to be practised and embedded.

The words awe, wonder and WOW set emotional and social expectations that an activity is going to be amazing. Some activities didn't work as well, which is a normal part of trying something new. When taking any risk, small failures along the way are a useful and important learning process.

The highlight of the whole project was seeing the energy and enthusiasm of the teachers for their WOW learning experiments and Wonder Days. They finished the project keen to take their learning forwards and with the skills to do so.



**The whole class's attitude to learning is beginning to shift towards being more free thinking and questioning across the curriculum.**



Class teacher

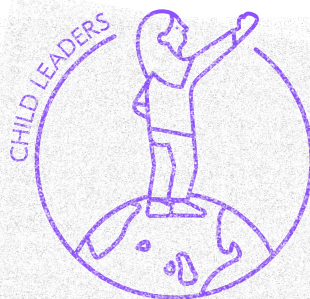
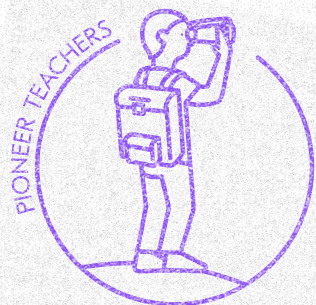
# A Strange Event: a cross-curricular immersive mystery

By Katharine James  
(Creative practitioner)

An immersive mystery can:

- Provide a participatory cross-curricular learning experience.
- Offer a space for children to lead their own learning and develop communication, collaboration, critical thinking and analytical skills.
- Be a platform for staff collaboration and experimentation.
- Create a buzz of excitement and curiosity within the wider school community.

Use this tool to think through your own immersive mystery. We've outlined a week-long mystery but you can adapt this to suit your setting/needs.



## Before you start

- **Talk to the Head Teacher / SLT:** You'll need their buy-in.
- **Establish a core team:** We recommend three: a project manager (in charge of the schedule, deadlines and logistics); a lesson-planning facilitator (present at lesson-planning sessions to maintain clarity, share great ideas and be the go-to person for concerns / issues); a senior leader.
- **Work out your lead time:** We recommend six weeks as a sensible timeframe in which to generate an event idea, introduce it to staff, organise it and plan a lesson framework.
- **Put it in the diary:** Ideally you'll explore all areas of the curriculum through the lens of the project – this might mean you come off-timetable for up to a week depending on your ambitions. When could this fit into the school calendar? Might it be a way to open or close a term?
- **Define your guiding principles:** Agree on some key words / phrases that communicate how you want people to feel and how you want staff and pupils to participate. Here are a few examples:
  - **AMAZING:** a theatrical, physical stimulus that will grip imaginations and provide the foundation for a whole week of work.
  - **PLAUSIBLE:** an event that could happen – something that Y6 children could believe.

- **COLLABORATIVE:** staff take ownership and have the space to experiment, take risks, and play.
- **EMPOWERING:** children are empowered to guide the week's learning with their questions and ideas.
- **OPEN-ENDED:** a project with an emphasis on investigating rather than solving, recognising that evidence can point in many directions.
- **COMMUNAL:** the whole school is involved as a community.

### 1. Generating ideas for your Strange Event

Brainstorm ideas with your core team, a wider staff group, or through a suggestions box in the staff room. Use the following questions as a starting point:

- Has something landed on the roof / in the school grounds? Has something appeared in a classroom? Has something mysteriously disappeared?
- What is it?
- Why is it there/not there anymore?

### 2. Developing your idea

Once you've got a strong idea for your Strange Event you need to hone it to make sure it's clear, simple and possible. The following questions might help:

- Does it excite, inspire you and fire your imagination?
- Does it speak to the project aims and guiding principles?
- Is it plausible? Will the children buy into it?

- Is it safe?
- Is there any cost involved? If so, how much and do we have the budget?

Once you're clear on your idea, work out:

- When will people encounter the event and who will discover it?
- Are going to transform any areas of the school? If so how, when, and who can help?
- What do you need the staff to do and when?

Finally, write your idea into a short, exciting pitch. Create a backstory as a "jumping off point" – it should offer avenues for pupils to explore, not just a linear path to one solution.

### 3. Engaging the staff – the introductory briefing session

Invite all staff (including teaching assistants / cover staff / anyone who might be involved) to a meeting to introduce your Strange Event idea. Explain:

- What will happen and how? (Pitch and backstory)
- The purpose of the project for pupils and staff.
- The timeframe.
- Responsibilities: What will they need to do – do they have to make things? Who will they need to work with? When are the deadlines they will need to meet?
- How the core team will support them.
- **Swear them to secrecy** – this is vital!



#### 4. Lesson sketching: planning a flexible framework for child-led learning

(60 minutes)

##### Tip:

We recommend planning lessons in small teams – two year-groups together for example. These should be facilitated by the assigned member of the core team who will need to:

- Outline any expectations / specific tasks that all classes should complete. We recommend dedicating a lesson early on – if not the first – for the staff and pupils to create an evidence board or space in their classroom which is added to throughout the week.
- Encourage staff to share their concerns / excitement.
- Share any 'gem' ideas generated by the other teams.

During this one-hour planning session you should:

1. Recap the shape of the week. Get the teachers to note any key moments on a blank timetable. (5 mins)
2. All together: discuss all the exciting things you could teach off the back of the Strange Event (have a few prepared in case it's a slow start). Keep the discussion moving – the point is to get as much information as possible. (10 mins)
3. Brainstorm 15-20 lesson headings across all areas of the curriculum that could stem from the Strange Event. (5 mins)
4. Take three each and expand them into three bullet-point plans. Share them verbally. (10 mins)

5. Swap plans. Everyone adds two additional points to each of their colleague's three plans. (5 mins)
6. Take six of the expanded plans and write the headers onto your blank timetables. Take a different colour and switch the order. (5 mins)
7. Open discussion – have we got enough material? Are we covering the curriculum? Do we need more ideas? (5 mins)
8. Think about the momentum of the week – when would it be good to find clues to help the mystery, how do you want this to happen? Does the caretaker come in with a bag 'found' on the roof? Does someone find a key in a flower bed? (5 mins)
9. Discussion: how is everyone feeling now and what else do they need to do to feel confident before the week starts? (5 mins)



**When someone stops in their tracks, it changes their normal way of going about their day... the children and the adults were really excited. They needed to know what had happened. They were launching into their own enquiries, both adults and children were very engaged.**



Class teacher

### 5. Preparing for the Strange Event

In the run-up to the event, hold short weekly meetings to ensure everyone is on track. All teachers involved need to be on the same page and need to feel confident that they can improvise in response to pupils' ideas. Remember not to let pupils know something is afoot.

### 6. Reflecting on the Strange Event

1. Build in time for staff personal reflection. We recommend short written surveys before and immediately after the project week.

**Before:** How are staff feeling and why? What do they think the challenges will be? What are they most excited about? What they are nervous about?

**After:** How do they feel now and why? What were the most exciting/challenging moments in the week and why? What did they learn from the project? Did any of their pupils surprise them – how? How did the project address the key aims? What would they change?

2. Hold an open discussion session in the week after the event to reflect on the value of the project and its impact on the children / parents / you. Close this discussion with everyone making some commitment that will move towards embedding the project learning.
3. Final evaluation: With the core team, review the surveys / themes identified in the discussion and isolate two or three learnings that you want to commit to embedding. Then work out how you're going to do this: who will help? What's the timeframe? What does success look like?

4. Pupil reflection: You might find it valuable to reflect on the event with your classes. Be careful though, you don't want the children to realise it was all a hoax.



**Tip:** You might find the creative lesson evaluation activities listed later in this resource helpful.

### Adaptation

- **Developing the idea:** Can you plan an immersive, cross-curricular week every year? Every term? Can you involve parents, invite local schools? Create press interest?
- **Scaling the idea down:** How can an immersive mystery be planned for one day / one year group / one class?
- **Bite-sizing the idea:** Consider how an immersive mystery can take over one lesson. How can you create a mystery out of a locked cupboard / a strange shell that has appeared on the teacher's desk one morning?
- **Adapting the idea:** Could an immersive mystery / stimulus event help launch new topics?

### Putting this idea into practice: Creative Catalyst case study

## How can a whole-school mystery help boost pupil engagement and build cross-curricular links?

Malden Parochial Church of England Primary School – Kingston

By Katharine James  
(Creative practitioner)

### Project partners

Katharine James (Creative practitioner)  
Felicity Coyne (Class teacher)  
Fiona McConville (SLT)  
The staff of Malden Parochial C of E Primary School

### The Big Idea

To develop a project that could collapse traditional subject boundaries and provide opportunities for pupils to write across the whole curriculum. We wanted to create a physical, theatrical project that would capture the imaginations of the whole school community; that would open the space for staff to work collaboratively and that would allow children to take responsibility for their learning.

### Why?

Staff at Malden Parochial had noticed a trend: pupils were writing to different standards for different subjects. Someone might be a brilliant writer in English lessons, an average writer in history and a poor writer when it came to science.



**I've learnt the importance of trusting children with their learning; stimulus inspired learning is the best**



Class teacher

We discussed the fundamentals of writing and agreed that at heart, writing – whether it's creative or factual or personal – communicates story. Maybe pupils needed a space to find the story in whatever they were writing, irrespective of the subject.

### What we did...

#### 1. We came up with a clear, exciting idea...

"On Monday 5th February, pupils arrive at school to find three fantastical flying machines crash-landed across the grounds. WHY are they there? WHERE did they come from? WHO flew them? It's all a bit of a mystery..."

We also created the following backstory:

"Three amateur flying machine enthusiasts have taken part in a crazy Wacky Races-style flying contest. They ran into weather trouble and were forced to crash land in the school grounds. They have scarp-ered, unharmed, leaving behind their flying machines and a series of clues which are discovered over the course of the week..."



## 2. We facilitated a project design workshop with the whole school staff

We split the staff up to work in their three 'phase' teams (i.e. years 1 & 2). Each team would take responsibility for designing a flying machine. The teams had 45 minutes to decide:

- Who was their pilot? Their name / where they were from / their passion or occupation
- What machine had they flown? What did staff have at home/in supply cupboards that could make a plausible flying machine?
- What clues have they left behind? What could their pilot have dropped on the premises that would point to their identity?

The teams then had three weeks to assemble their flying machines and source clues. They used items they already had in their store cupboards and the results were fantastic – and believable!

## 3. We facilitated a session to create a flexible lesson framework

Teachers collaborated in their phase teams to:

- Sketch out a loose list of cross-curricular lesson ideas based on the machines and clues that would be found. The children would be leading the investigation and the teachers would need to be able to respond flexibly to whatever direction they wanted to take.
- Decide when they might need clues to be 'discovered' in order to maintain momentum, deepen the investigation, or re-energise it.

## 4. We established a closing frame

The only task that we asked all the classes to do was to write a letter to one of the pilots at the end of the week. All the letters would

be gathered up into one envelope ready to post before half term.

## 5. We set the structure of the week

1. Monday: an 'emergency assembly' was held to brief the whole school that although the site has been checked and everything is safe, no-one knows what has happened – so let's investigate!
2. Wednesday: a 'journalist' came in to interview all classes.
3. Thursday PM: a pilot came in to give a talk.
4. Friday PM: parents were invited to look around the classrooms at the work created by the pupils.

The result was a week-long mystery that captured the imaginations of pupils, parents and staff alike. Children led their own way through the curriculum areas guided by their interests and clues. Written work thrived across these different curriculum areas, inspired by the mystery.

### What we learnt

With strong, willing collaborative work, it's possible to create amazing learning experiences that don't cost the earth or involve a lot of planning. The important thing is to create a process and a project structure in which everyone is invested and responsible for making it work.



**This has been the best week of my life!**



Pupil

## Free-range assemblies: child-led presentations of learning and achievement

By Joanna Seymour, Head Teacher for St Peter and St Paul Catholic Primary Academy (Bromley).

A free-range assembly is an interactive event developed and led entirely by pupils, where visitors roam the “market stall” setup and get a taste of the work pupils want to share with other years, parents and teachers. This type of event offers a new invitation for parents to connect with their children’s learning.

4. Step back, let go and allow children to direct the learning.
5. Allow children to choose their working partners.
6. Senior leadership support and encourage staff and pupils.
7. A quick and easy system for self-evaluation.

### Your free-range assembly could include:

- Pupils demonstrating their learning through timed performances.
- Participatory activities that challenge parents to do the same learning activities as their children, but in bite-sized ways – enabling parents to understand what and how pupils learn.

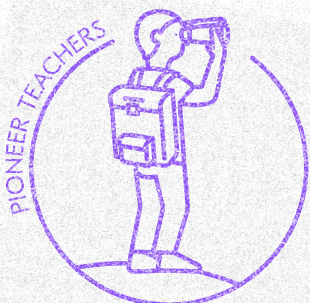
### Ingredients for a successful free-range assembly

1. Pupil voice: pupils steer the development of stalls and activities for stall visitors, developing their own communication and collaboration skills.
2. Ensure every pupil has a role: this will mean that the free-range assembly format reflects all ranges of learners/types of student.
3. Parent participation: parents are not simply an audience, but actively participate in class project ideas for themselves



#### Tip:

Why not seek inspiration from the lesson evaluation activities listed later in this resource?



### Reflecting on your event

Hold one or more staff meetings / INSETs to answer the following questions:

- What would feel like an exciting yet manageable risk to take in your event? What could connect teachers, pupils and parents in a powerful new way?
- How can participatory activities underscore key messages you'd like parents to receive about their child's learning and school experience?
- How will you gather and make best use of feedback, both from children and parents?
- Who else might you invite, e.g., governors, councillors, others with a key stake in your school? Can the invitation itself be participatory and engaging?
- How can you ensure every student has a meaningful role in assemblies, whether it be presenting, welcoming, or capturing feedback from your visitors?
- How will you embed this into your assembly schedule?
- Could parts of selected lessons be dedicated to adding to and building up small scale displays for an eventual market stall event?
- Could the focus be either about a book, a topic, or about a curriculum area such as a concept in maths?
- Can the free-range assembly help teachers to assess their pupils' learning?



**They [the teachers] also learnt that they too are creative even when they think they are not.**



Head Teacher

## Putting this idea into practice: Creative Catalyst case study

# How can an alternative assembly approach give children greater decision-making opportunities?

St Peter and St Paul Catholic Primary Academy – Bromley

By Joanna Seymour,  
Head Teacher for St Peter  
and St Paul Catholic Primary  
Academy (Bromley).

## Project partners

Lucy Thornton (Creative practitioner)  
Dan Stringer (Year 4 Class teacher)  
Erika Mint (Year 3 Class teacher)  
Joanna Seymour (Head Teacher)  
The pupils of Willow and Birch classes



**Parents' perspectives of what happens in schools has improved, and their willingness to engage is much greater, and they have a more positive outlook on what we do.**



Class teacher

## The Big Idea

To use the idea of 'free-range assemblies' to put children in the lead and boost levels of parental engagement. To explore the potential connection between parental engagement and improved attendance.

## Why?

The school wanted to improve vocabulary and problem-solving skills and to share pupils' learning around vocabulary with parents and the rest of the school.

## What we did...

### In classes

Year 3 and 4 children developed team building, vocabulary and problem-solving skills through ten weeks of separate arts-based tasks, using sound as stimulus. This was linked to the classes' individual curriculum topics using the creative techniques taught to us by Lucy and the MCS team.

### Central project: tree sculpture

Lucy, the teachers and the pupils jointly developed a vision to build a large sculptural tree, which would host their new vocabulary and learning within the bark, branches and leaves.

### Parental engagement

Parent engagement wasn't limited to the assembly. For example, one day at home time parents were met in the playground by their children and asked to take home a leaf, write a word on it and share this word the next day with the class.

#### An outline of the free-range assembly

**One day before:** Children set up their stalls showcasing ten weeks' worth of MCS class activities and finished the large 'vocabulary tree' sculpture.

**9.00am on the day of the assembly:** Parents were greeted at the school gate by Lucy and a group of pupils reciting a chant they had created as part of a music-led MCS activity. Pupils led parents to the hall.

Inside the hall was the finished vocabulary tree sculpture, surrounded by ten stalls setting out different themed pieces of writing and images with different activities parents could try themselves. Each stall was attended by around five pupils who introduced their work and explained the activity the visitors could try. Every pupil had a role.

Activities for parents included:

- Make your own hieroglyphic codes
- Add a word to the vocabulary tree
- Make a 'virtuous vocabulary' sentence using set words
- Write scripts for shadow puppetry
- Make your own poem using the forest sounds as inspiration.

Suddenly, the pupils left their stalls to form a circle around the vocabulary tree and collectively performed a forest soundscape using their own voices and bodies. A select number of pupils stepped forward to read poems they had written about forests. They repeated this at regular intervals.

The parents were free to stay as long as they wished. Other classes were invited to visit. The event lasted all morning and was repeated again after school for those parents who didn't manage to see it in the morning.

#### What we learnt

The development of the free-range assembly was at first daunting, as both teachers and children had to let go of the norm and free themselves from a perceived convention of what an assembly should look like. Once the children discovered that they were going to share their learning in a participatory way, which they found very stimulating, the idea of presenting in a different style held no fears for them. Teachers took a longer time to realise the whole vision as they had to address the issues of how to manage the assembly, the health and safety of all taking part and have the courage of their convictions that it really was going to work.

Once called to the hall, the free-range assembly allowed the children to speak to parents about their learning, to question parents' own knowledge and show off their expertise. It meant that parents could witness first-hand the things teachers see daily such as collaborative working, listening, questioning of each other and waiting for each to express their opinion. As the parental feedback demonstrated, this came as a revelation to many.



**It's just brilliant, I love being able to hear my child speak like this.**



Parent

# The Game of Life: child-led redesign of British Values

By Simon Batchelor  
(Creative practitioner) and  
Pauline Newton (Class teacher)

British Values can often feel difficult to teach or understand. Bringing these abstract concepts to life and making them relevant to pupils is key, and the Game of Life offers the opportunity to do so through 'creative challenges'.

British Values can be rearticulated by children to form a common set of 'Life Values', unique to the school: values that pupils feel are important to create a safe community. The Game of Life is a creative, child-led way of teaching these values.

## Before you start

Identify a class or group to become 'Game Creators'. We suggest Year 3 pupils, but the activities can be adapted according to the age and ability of any age group.

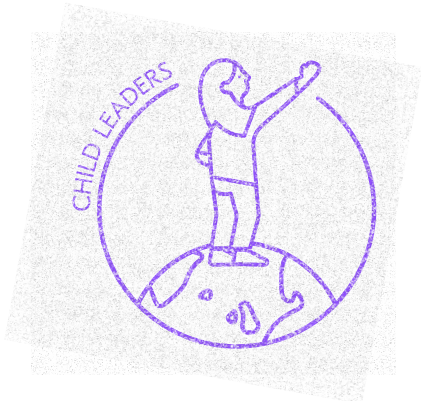
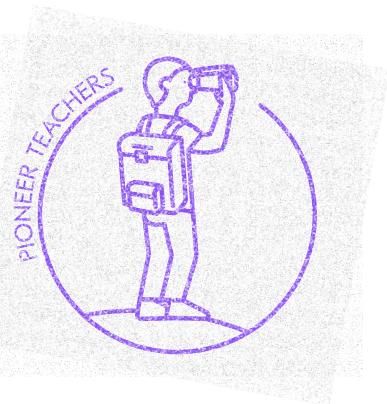
## How to create the game

### Stage 1: Children develop a set of common Life Values

(45 minutes)

1. Roll out a big sheet of paper. In pairs, ask the children to lie down on the paper and draw an outline around each other.
2. Ask children, what is important to them? What are they passionate about? Write/draw these personal values in the body area.
3. Ask children, what life skills do they need to achieve their hobbies and interests? Write/draw these life skills in the head area.
4. Looking at these life skills, think about the school environment: what skills do the children need to be able to work at their best and what skills are needed for a safe, successful school community? Circle those skills.
5. Ask each child to choose one life skill they think is most important and write it on a post-it note. Sit in a circle. Play snap. If one child has the same as another, they move to sit next to each other. Go around the circle sharing why the children chose those skills.

After the lesson, bring together all of the skills that came up more than once – these are the collective Life Values, unique to the class.



## Stage 2: Children co-design creative challenges based on each Life Value

(45-60 minutes per value)

The Game of Life is played by exploring and demonstrating these values through arts-based 'creative challenges', which classes across the school complete.

Over the course of a lesson, take the Game Creators through these steps to create a set of five creative challenges for every Life Value:

1. Set the class the creative goal: to develop a set of exciting, creative challenges to explore the Life Values for other pupils across the school.
2. Demonstrate: have the pupils explore a number of creative challenges set by you, e.g. play human bingo, create a group 'freeze-frame', drawing, short poem, sculpture, music etc.
3. Co-create: in small groups the children can now develop some ideas of their own for creative challenges together.
  - Start by asking the children to think about different challenge outcomes, for example getting people to write a poem, draw, perform, build etc.
  - Take one Life Value at a time and explore how to creatively represent it. For example, what might 'kindness' sound like?
  - As a group, choose a favourite challenge from the suggestions.
4. Groups pitch this challenge idea to the rest of the class.
5. As a class, decide upon the final five challenges per Life Value.
6. Design a Creative Challenge card for the board game.
7. Move on until each Life Value has its own Creative Challenge card of five challenges.

### Game of Life Creative Challenge card Teamwork

- **Build the tallest tower using anything in the room.**
- **Make music using your bodies. A whole group 2 minute performance.**
- **Choose a colour that represents teamwork. Draw a picture of teamwork in that colour.**
- **Make a whole group bridge using just your bodies.**

Sample Creative Challenge Card by Year 3 pupils at Regina Coeli Catholic Primary School

## Stage 3: Children design a board game and space to share challenge outcomes

1. Design the board to track the progress of the game. You will need the same number of squares as the number of Life Values, plus a finishing point. Make it big and colourful.
2. Design a shared space for the challenge outcomes (artworks, poems etc) to be displayed.
3. Create counters for classes to move across the board.
4. Think of a prize for the winning class.

### Stage 4: Children launch the game across the whole school

1. Find a fun and creative way to invite the rest of the school to play. For example, put the invites in golden envelopes or have children dress up to deliver them.
2. Gather the school and launch the game, e.g. at a whole school assembly. The Game Creators could open the event with a performance.

### Stage 5: Play the Game of Life as a school

We suggest allocating one week for each class across the school to explore one Life Value. Therefore, if you have eight values, you will need eight weeks left in the term to complete the game.

The activity could be set as a 10 minute activity on a Monday morning, in circle/ golden time, or as homework.

1. Issue the week's Life Value challenges in an exciting way. Classes pick a challenge from the list of five options and place their creative outcomes (drawings, photos etc) into the shared display space for all to see.
2. Classes move their class counter forward on the board game as they complete their weekly challenge.
3. Each week, ask teachers to choose a 'Creative Champion' – a pupil who has demonstrated the Life Value for that week, e.g. Kindness – and award them with a rosette and/or certificate. You could celebrate in assembly and newsletter.
4. Encourage the children to talk with each other about the challenges, the values, opinions and beliefs.
5. Pick an overall winning class and celebrate their creations in an assembly.

### Reflection

Reflect with your class on the activities – how are these Values related to British Values? How was the process of letting children create their own Life Values?



#### Tip:

Why not seek inspiration from the creative lesson evaluation activities listed later in this resource?

### Adaptation

- **Scaling this idea down:** Can the Game of Life be developed and played in one class/one year group only?
- **Scaling this idea up:** Can other classes across the school develop their own Life Values to keep the game going?
- **Scaling the idea up even more:** Can the Game of Life be played with another local school, or school/s in your multi-academy trust, alliance or umbrella trust?
- **Adopting and adapting the framework:** The Game of Life framework hinges on setting the goal; demonstrating; co-creating. It supports child-led exploration and development of ideas. Can you adapt this framework and apply this to other projects or lessons?



## Putting this idea into practice: Creative Catalyst case study

# How can child-led creative exploration make British Values meaningful?

Regina Coeli Catholic Primary School – Croydon

By Simon Batchelor  
(Creative practitioner)

## Project partners

Simon Batchelor (Creative practitioner)  
Pauline Newton (Year 3 Class teacher)  
The pupils of St Bridget's class



**The project has provided a chance for me to share... what I truly believe in, the way education should truly be; letting the children lead and putting creativity at the heart of learning.**



Creative practitioner

## The Big Idea

To support the teaching of British Values across the whole school through child-led exploration.

## Why?

British Values make a lot of us feel uncomfortable, but why? Defined as 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs', are these values unique to Britain – or are they universal?

This was our starting point at Regina Coeli Catholic Primary School: to take the 'Human Values' concept and explore how to create a safe and successful community in an exciting way.

## What we did...

### Discovering what they value

To begin with, the children generated nine common Life Values, all of which the children believed were necessary in order to become a safe and successful community:

- Respect
- Knowledge
- Kindness
- Empathy
- Helpfulness
- Teamwork
- Friendship
- Patience
- Listening

### A session framework for pupil-led exploration

We developed a session framework that would support our Year 3 'Game Creators' to work together to develop these activities entirely themselves.

Every session began with the Game Creators sharing thoughts and experiences about the week's chosen Life Value. This value was then brought to life, with the children being given time to visually represent the word through physical movement and 'freeze frames' in small groups. Following this, the whole class completed an example creative challenge which we set them. This gave them a chance to see different exciting outcomes to challenges - a poem, story, sculpture, physical act, sound etc.



**Their use of 'value-based' language demonstrates their sense of ownership. Respect, Friendship, Kindness, Helpfulness, Listening, Empathy, Knowledge and Teamwork are banded around the room, permeating the conversation.**



Class teacher

Back in their groups, the Game Creators then put on their thinking hats and began designing new and exciting challenges of their own for this Life Value. Each group could come up with a few ideas but then had to agree amongst themselves a final idea to pitch to the rest of the class. The class eventually agreed on five ideas to become the creative challenges for that Life Value.

The children also created an enormous board game and display space so that, once the game was officially launched across the school, classes could collectively exhibit their creative responses to chosen challenges.

### What we learnt

Collaboration between teachers and practitioners can be difficult at times due to differing approaches and boundaries, but if a good relationship can be formed where there is trust and listening, this allows everyone to take risks. The job of the creative practitioner is to work with the teacher to try new ways of working with students. This can be as simple as 'let's push the tables and chairs back', or 'let's get the children to lead and create the challenges with no input from us', and ultimately 'let's see what happens!'

# How to begin a wellbeing conversation in your school

By Abigail Hunt  
(Creative practitioner)  
and Alex McIntyre  
(Creative practitioner)

Use these tips and arts-led ideas amongst your whole staff team, to help you create a safe space to discuss issues and achievements alike together.

## Before you start

Like exercise, looking after personal and community wellbeing is an ongoing practice. Longer term rewards may include: more emotionally aware staff; adults who take a solution-oriented approach to problems; improved communication; and better functioning teams.

Make time to reflect on current staff experiences and be sure to listen to each other actively and without judgement, thereby creating a safe environment for discussion.



### Tips:

- Expect some resistance and have courage.
- Embark on your journey with team mates and a support system in place.
- You might like to agree some codes of behaviour together e.g.:
  1. To listen
  2. Be kind
  3. Be open and honest



## Two activities to try in your staff meeting:

### Postcard chats:

This activity helps stimulate a conversation through visual aids.  
(10 minutes)

1. Lay out postcards / images
2. Each staff member chooses an image that represents their day
3. Have a conversation with someone you haven't connected with in a while (sharing in pairs):
  - Why did you choose the image?
  - What were your best moments today?
  - What about challenging moments?
  - What one thing do you want to remember?

Reflect as a group – what was useful about the activity?  
What do you notice?



### Tip:

You can use this activity in your class as a warm up or themed discussion prompts around a curriculum area or topic.

### Wellbeing Collage:

This is a practical, creative exercise to stimulate conversation through the process of making and collaborating.  
(30 minutes)

Lay out a large sheet of paper, glue sticks and scissors. Together create a collage.

You might like to explore, discuss and respond to the questions below at the same time:

- What does wellbeing mean to us?
- When do we experience it?
- What stops or damages a sense of wellbeing?
- Whose responsibility is this?
- What do we do currently to look after our wellbeing (personal and community)?
- What else could we do?
- How would we like to take our thinking forward?



#### Tip:

You can use a similar activity with your pupils in class time.

### Reflect as a group

What was useful about these activities? What do you notice?



**The teachers we worked with were amazing. [Their] generosity and sense of personal responsibility, combined with a moral compass and dedication to building a better world through teaching and education, is extraordinary. They have inspiring ideas and hold the potential to fulfil them.**



Creative practitioner

**Putting this idea into practice: Creative Catalyst case study**

# How can creative activities for all school staff open up opportunities to discuss personal wellbeing?

West Thornton Primary Academy – Croydon

By Abigail Hunt  
(Creative practitioner)  
and Alex McIntyre  
(Creative practitioner)

## Project partners

Abigail Hunt (Creative practitioner)  
Alex McIntyre (Creative practitioner)  
Maggie Delwiche (Class teacher)  
Claire Bracher (SLT)  
The staff community

## The Big Idea

This Creative Catalyst project focused on the needs of the adults in school rather than the children. Our aim in this project was to find ways for adults to discuss, understand, take responsibility for, and improve, their own wellbeing – both individually and collectively.

## Why?

Nationwide media coverage talks of teacher stress, increasing pressure and burnout. Many schools also speak of the challenges of changing staff teams and staff retention. These issues are by their very nature difficult for staff to acknowledge and discuss. The project ambition was therefore to begin to shift school culture and to find ways for the school community to support each other - to do 'things' differently.

## What we did...

The project had two strands:

1. Space 2: A place for adults working in the school to visit in spare moments. Visual artist Abigail created artworks within the space and invited staff to respond. Staff could collaboratively add to the art, allowing it to grow gradually. This hands-on activity helped people connect to the space – staff were focussed on something away from stresses of school, if only briefly.
2. Artist and coach Alex offered confidential 1-to-1 and group sessions with selected members of staff. Using drawing and coaching techniques she facilitated a listening space, which was directly responsive to the needs of the individual/s. Each participant set a goal for the session and was primarily responsible for its content, outcomes and subsequent actions.

### What we learnt

Our key role as creative practitioners was to provide support for the teachers. They will continue to address the issue of adult wellbeing in school— our role was to create an environment for them to begin the journey.

A strong collaborative partnership is based on mutual trust and the ability to articulate, share and challenge each other safely. Everyone brought different skills and perspectives, creating rich opportunities for the exchange of ideas. Early project planning conversations meant the four-person team formed a strong partnership through which we were able to articulate thinking and challenge each other.

The project was a positive reminder of the importance of the process of creativity, and the value of immersing yourself in materials and making.



**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

## Creative Lesson Evaluation: activities and tips

This document is a tool for class reflection. It outlines a sample of evaluation activities and ideas developed by some of our MCS teachers and practitioners to capture the opinion of the pupils at the end of a project session, lesson or workshop.

### Things to think about when setting up an evaluation activity:

- Have a clear understanding of what you want to evaluate and why. We used these questions: what new things did you learn? How hard did you find today's workshop/project? Did you find a way of solving the challenge? How well did you work together? What was your favourite part of the workshop/project? What would you do differently next time?
- How long can you allocate to evaluating your lesson? Our teachers reserved the last ten minutes at the end of each project session for evaluation.
- Who will be leading the evaluation activity and who will be recording and observing?
- Make sure you understand what you need to know and the best way to achieve this. Choose your evaluation approaches that work best for you and will best achieve insight for the questions you need answers to.
- Make sure you have all the materials you need prepared and ready for each session.
- Think about how the activity leads into the session reflection – how the evaluation activity flows on from what you have been exploring. Which activity works best if your session has focused on drama? Which one would be most effective if you have been working outdoors?



### Tip:

These activities can also be adapted for teacher INSET and CPD sessions.

## Vox pop

<u>Activity idea</u>	<u>Good because...</u>	<u>Be aware...</u>	<u>Adaptation</u>
<p>Use a microphone (pretend or real) and ask the pupils questions in the manner of a TV interview. Could be recorded or just pretend.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It can be used to address most evaluation questions.</li> <li>● Fun.</li> <li>● Gets pupils used to speaking out.</li> <li>● Encourages quick thinking: you have to say what you think straight away.</li> <li>● A powerful documentation tool if recorded.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Quieter ones may not be so keen.</li> <li>● Requires someone to make notes to document pupil responses, if not being recorded.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Place the pupils in the role of roving reporters who are interviewing fellow pupils.</li> <li>● Support pupils to develop interview questions that address the evaluation and probe further to understand the responses.</li> <li>● Discuss the value of open-ended and closed interview questions.</li> </ul>

## Learning tree

<u>Activity idea</u>	<u>Good because...</u>	<u>Be aware...</u>	<u>Adaptation</u>
<p>Create a tree on a display board. Pupils add a leaf detailing what they think they have learnt.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creates a visual record that documents progress as an additional element of the evaluation. Something the class can watch develop.</li> <li>● A more kinetic version of written feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If facilitated, it requires dedicated time for pupils to write down their learning and pin it up.</li> <li>● If not facilitated, it will require constant prompts and reminders.</li> <li>● You need to document any new additions to the tree in the context of your project plan.</li> <li>● If the session you are evaluating was very active, sitting down to write a reflection can be inhibiting for some.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What they write on their leaf could respond to a range of other questions. It could be adjusted depending on what you want to track.</li> </ul>



**Anyone who...**  
**(also known as fruit salad)**

<u>Activity idea</u>	<u>Good because...</u>	<u>Be aware...</u>	<u>Adaptation</u>
<p>Get the group to sit in a circle. Facilitator sits in the middle and makes a statement that starts with 'Anyone who...', e.g., 'anyone who ate breakfast this morning' or 'anyone who has a pet.' Everyone who the statement applies to has to get out of their seat and find a new seat. Participants are not allowed to move to the chairs next to them or back into their own chair. The exercise gradually moves towards statements relevant to the project, e.g., 'Anyone who has learned something interesting today'. Facilitator can also 'freeze' the exercise, holding people mid-move, and tap them on the shoulder to ask them about a given statement, e.g., 'What did you learn that was interesting?'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fun.</li> <li>● Physical way of communicating your opinion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In an evaluation/ documentation context, it is important that the same or similar questions are asked each time the activity is done.</li> <li>● It may also be useful to note which children are being asked and gauging the evolution of their responses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pupils could act as the facilitator rather than the teacher: the person left without a seat moves into the middle and asks the next question beginning 'Anyone who...' Pupils may need some guiding thoughts on what questions to ask that will explore a specific area for your evaluation.</li> </ul>

## Box

<u>Activity idea</u>	<u>Good because...</u>	<u>Be aware...</u>	<u>Adaptation</u>
<p>Mark out a box shape on the floor with masking tape. Pupils stand within or outside it depending on their answers to questions. The central point inside the box equates to 'strongly agree', outside of the box equates to 'do not agree'. Tap select pupils on the shoulder to ask them about a given statement, e.g., 'What did you learn that was interesting?'</p> <p>If space is an issue, can you go outside? Or use another school area? Alternatively, move the tables and chairs to create one long line using tape along the floor. If pupils stand on the line they 'strongly agree', if they are far away from the line they 'do not agree'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Physical way of demonstrating your views/feelings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Questions will need to be developed as statements so that they initiate an agree/disagree answer.</li> <li>● Gives you a general overview of group opinion. Difficult to measure accurately. Someone would need to look carefully at the general picture and translate that for your evaluation.</li> <li>● Care will need to be taken to measure and understand the change in pupils' attitudes to these statements over time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● See 'scale' activity.</li> <li>● Ask pupils for more information about where they are standing and why.</li> </ul>

### Snowballs

<u>Activity idea</u>	<u>Good because...</u>	<u>Be aware...</u>	<u>Adaptation</u>
<p>Ask pupils to write comments on paper to a key question e.g. What have you learnt? What did you find most challenging? Then ask pupils to make their paper into a ball and throw into the middle of the room. Pupils pick up a snowball and read out the answer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Anonymity.</li> <li>● Fun.</li> <li>● Incorporates physicality and written responses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Requires someone to collect up and review all the responses afterwards each time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Questions can be adapted to suit your more specific tracking needs.</li> <li>● Pupils can pick up a snowball and write another statement or question responding to the original statement on the snowball.</li> </ul>

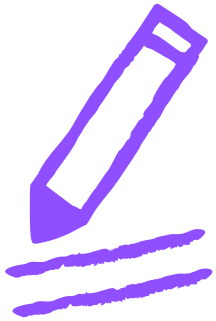
### Symbols

<u>Activity idea</u>	<u>Good because...</u>	<u>Be aware...</u>	<u>Adaptation</u>
<p>Use emojis or images for pupils to select to represent their opinion or feeling about the activities. Observe the differences and similarities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Quick and easy way to gauge responses.</li> <li>● Effective for SEND settings and pupils learning English.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● You will need to collect and review all the responses each time to track any change in opinion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pupils could be asked to select three images taken during the activities which best represent moments of enjoyment, challenge and working together effectively.</li> </ul>

## Scale

<u>Activity idea</u>	<u>Good because...</u>	<u>Be aware...</u>	<u>Adaptation</u>
<p>Use the space to represent a scale that measures opinion or feeling about a subject.</p> <p>Ask pupils to place themselves on the 'scale' according to whether they agree or disagree with a statement. The facilitator starts with some light statements first e.g., 'I like football' – then gradually goes deeper with statements relevant to the project, e.g. 'I think maths is easy'.</p> <p>The facilitator asks some people why they are standing where they are, thereby opening discussion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Physical way of demonstrating your views/ feelings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Questions will need to be developed as statements so that they initiate an agree/disagree answer.</li> <li>● In an evaluation/ documentation context, it is important that the same or similar questions are asked each time the activity is done. It may also be useful to note which children are being asked and gauging the evolution of their responses.</li> <li>● Care will need to be taken to measure and understand the change in pupils' attitudes to these statements over time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● See 'box' activity.</li> <li>● Ask pupils for more information about where they are standing and why.</li> </ul>

## 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

# Framework for Change

Tools to explore new approaches  
to your own school challenges

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## Introduction

### Develop your own Creative Catalyst project

A Creative Catalyst project is a new way of thinking about school improvement challenges. It requires a commitment from senior leadership level down to develop school-focused arts activities that will address a key priority in a school's Development Plan.

A critical aim of the Creative Catalyst model is for schools to be able to adapt and use the ideas, activities and new creative processes on an ongoing basis. Teachers using the Creative Catalyst model have embedded their learning into practice in a range of ways, including but not limited to:

- Finding new, arts-led dynamic starting points with their classes
- Lesson planning using one or more art-forms as a framework or key driver, e.g., using role play to teach history
- Creative approaches to staff meetings, INSET etc., to make them more interesting and engaging
- Using the arts to link different subjects, e.g., maths and literacy through movement and storytelling.





## The Creative Catalyst Tools

Chloe Osborne  
(Creative producer)  
Greg Klerkx,  
(Creative advocate)

These three tools have been developed to support teachers, support staff and Senior Leadership Members to collaboratively:

**Explore** initial ideas and investigate the way arts can support a school challenge or development/improvement priority.

**Plan** a project which explores creative approaches to teaching and learning in support of the identified school challenge or development/improvement priority.

**Embed** learning and fresh insights to nourish the school's creative ecology and develop new strategies for responding to school challenges.



### Tip:

You may wish to enlarge the following planning tools onto A3 sized paper for more room to write down your ideas.

## Explore

Developing an arts-led experiment that is linked to key challenges in your School Development Plan (SDP) is an investigative process.

This tool will help you to:

- Look at your challenges from multiple perspectives;
- Think beyond the processes and approaches with which you are already familiar;
- Take the time and brain space to consider many possible starting points;
- Explore what resonates and excites you so you can inspire pupils.

Prompts:



1

**a** What are the priorities in your SDP?

**b** What one/s do you want to explore?

3

What are the perceived challenges in this exploration? E.g. landscape, dynamics, resources, capacity, etc...

2

What are the key elements that this can be broken down into?

4

Write down as many open questions as possible...

5

Drawing from all of the above, What's the big idea? What is the brave/resonant idea that you want pursue?

6

What is the launch point for your Creative Catalyst Project?

Next steps

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Reflect on your questions: which ones inspire you? Which ones excite you? Why?

# Plan

Follow the prompts below to design a project plan:



1

Our identified SDP...

2

Project Objective

What do you want to explore?

3

Project Advocates and Collaborators

Who is best placed to support the exploratory process?

How might these people contribute to the design of project activity?

4

Arts-led creative teaching and learning

What creative approaches do you intend to use?

How might you embrace risk taking/ try new things/ gain confidence in new creative approaches?

What do you need to support this process?

5

Logistics

Where, when and with whom will activity take place?

6

Reflective Practice

How will you know what's working?

How and with whom will you share any learning or new insights generated?

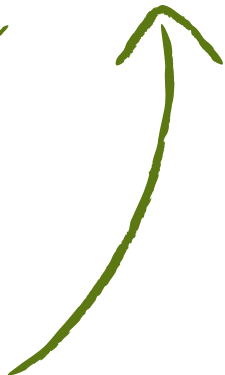
How can your project activity respond to pupil, teacher and parent contributions?

7

Reach

Who will the project reach? How will people know what's happening?

How might you invite more people to get involved?



# Embed



A critical aim of the Creative Catalyst project model is for teachers, and schools, to adapt and use the ideas, activities and processes generated on an ongoing basis. We call this embedding learning.

Follow the prompts below to design a process for embedding learning in your school:

1

What aspects of your Creative Catalyst project are you seeking to embed in your school, and why?

2

What is the 'reach' you are aiming for? E.g. whole school, an entire key stage, your whole staff team?

3

What support and resources do you need to properly embed this work? What case do you need to make to get them?

4

What are some of the possible barriers you might face? How might you address them?

5

What will change if you are successful with embedding the learning / new insights generated from your Creative Catalyst project?

6

What are your success criteria?

Plan your next steps:

What will happen?	What do you aim to achieve?
Who is responsible?	What are the conditions for making this work sustainable?
When is the timeframe?	



# 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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- 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's Catholic Primary Academy, Bromley
- St. William of Perth Catholic Primary School, Medway
- West Thornton Primary Academy, Croydon

## Creative practitioners

- Abigail Hunt
- Alex McIntyre
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- Katharine James
- Lucy Clare Thornton
- Maria Amidu
- Natasha Cossey
- Simon Batchelor
- Tas Emiabata
- Thor McIntyre-Burnie

## My Creative School core team:

- Chloe Osborne,  
Creative Producer
- Greg Klerkx,  
Creative Advocate
- Sarah B Davies,  
Programme Researcher  
and MCS Learning  
Resource curator/editor
- Martin Heaney,  
Programme Evaluator
- Alice Edwards, Senior  
Programmes Manager  
at A New Direction
- Rebecca Branch,  
Programme Director  
at A New Direction

# Unique approaches to School Development Priorities

My Creative School is a joint initiative between A New Direction and The Education Commission, supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation in 2016/17 and 2017/18.

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.