

3 The current educational climate: the creativity agenda

The research for the Education Programme Delivery Plan (EPDP) was informed by the view that there have been significant developments in educational thinking, which create a new climate within which museums' contribution to education can be advocated. This section outlines some of the evidence that suggests that the educational climate in the UK is changing, albeit slowly.

The Government's drive to raise attainment and combat disaffection is increasingly taking account of the potential benefits of creative and cultural experiences. There is an acknowledgement within Government that the testing regime and 'objective-led' teaching have entailed the neglect of activities which enrich children's educational experience, but do not necessarily produce outcomes that can be easily defined or quantified. The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) report *All Our Futures* (2000) highlighted 'creativity' as being of fundamental importance to the education system and to the country's future economic well-being. Creative Partnerships (see below) came into being as a direct response to *All Our Futures*.

Two reports published by Ofsted¹ – *Expecting the Unexpected: developing creativity in schools* (2003) and *Improving City Schools: how the arts can help* (2003) – indicate that cultural experiences are acknowledged to be an essential ingredient of good education. *Excellence and Enjoyment: A strategy for primary schools* (2003) sets out the Government's vision for primary education and is firm evidence that Government thinking is changing. A central theme is the notion of a "broad and rich curriculum" which develops children in a variety of ways. Whilst it still promotes "tests, targets and tables" as key tools for improvement, it also encourages teachers to take ownership of the curriculum and to be "creative and innovative" in how they teach and run the school.²

The *14-19 Opportunity and Excellence Green Paper* (2002) set out a new structure and framework for 14-19 learning.³ The main weakness in the system was perceived to be the lack of vocational routes or choices, but it was also felt that the academic routes on offer were too narrow. The paper paved the way for a blending of vocational and academic learning. Currently (2004) the 14-19 Working Group, chaired by Mike Tomlinson, is reviewing education for this age group. It is proposing a single framework of diplomas which will replace GCSEs and A Levels. It is expected that this will provide a more flexible system of learning, which could provide opportunities for schools to make more use of museums than the current system allows⁴.

In 2000, a review of the National Curriculum emphasised creativity as an important aim. The QCA⁵ followed up this review by investigating how schools can promote

¹ Office for Standards in Education

² *Excellence and Enjoyment. A strategy for primary schools* (DfES, 2003) p4

³ See www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/

⁴ See www.14-19reform.gov.uk/

⁵ The QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) maintains and develops the National Curriculum and associated assessments, tests and examinations; and accredits and monitors qualifications in

pupils' creativity through the National Curriculum. The QCA worked with teachers to investigate how they could develop pupils' creativity through their existing schemes of work and lesson plans. In 2004 it published the website, *Creativity: find it, promote it*⁶ as part of the National Curriculum in Action website. It offers guidance to teachers on recognising and promoting pupils' creative thinking and behaviour and gives examples of pupils' creativity across the curriculum.

The increased emphasis on thinking skills in schools is geared to enable pupils to focus more on their creative skills. It is a key element in the Government's drive to raise standards. As part of this current climate, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on a number of projects aimed at promoting creativity in schools. Museums are seen to have a role in helping schools deliver this creativity agenda. These include the Museums and Galleries Education Programme (MGEP)⁷ and Creative Partnerships. Both of these projects aim to build partnerships between schools and the cultural sector with a view to instilling creative teaching approaches in schools.

Currently, much of this debate is taking place under the heading of "personalised learning" – a recent "big idea" in education. The DfES is building a section on its website about this concept.⁸ Very simply, the question being debated is: how can schools meet the individual needs of children? It is an attempt to break away from the long – established approach of trying to get children to "fit into the system".

LEA officials and teachers that were interviewed for the EPDP research very much welcome this shift in the Government's strategy. The research has shown that individual LEAs and schools are using museums to help them deliver the 'creativity agenda'. For instance, Knowsley LEA, Knowsley Leisure Services and Arts Council North West jointly fund the post of Creative Learning Co-ordinator. This post has a very broad remit encompassing Sure Start and family learning, as well as formal education (5-18 years).

It is heartening that some LEAs and some schools are taking this new approach on board. LEA staff that were interviewed welcomed *Excellence and Enjoyment* because it will force LEAs and schools to think about creativity. They see museums as having a part to play in helping schools deliver a more creative curriculum. However, the research has shown that there are many hurdles to cross before teachers can really make the most of what museums can offer.

In May 2004 Tessa Jowell, the Culture Secretary, contributed to the debate in an essay about the value of culture:

Why do so many parents take their children to museums and galleries, why do they get them dance lessons, music lessons... Because they know it's important, not because they think their children are necessarily going to

colleges and at work. It produces schemes of work for teachers to follow. It is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the DfES.

⁶ <http://www.ncaction.org.uk/creativity/index.htm>

⁷ For a description of the Museums and Galleries Education Programme see www.cimg.org.uk/mgep/

⁸ www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/personalisedlearning

become artists or performers – although they might – but because of the value of what this exposure to culture gives them for the rest of their lives.⁹

The purpose of this research has been to advance the debate, and create a situation where all *schools* recognize the value of culture and are able to involve their pupils in it.

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www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_2004/Government_Value_of_Culture.htm