Creative Leadership in Learning at the Sydney Opera House

Michael Anderson and Peter O'Connor

Abstract The creative leadership in learning program was a partnership between a major performing arts venue and creative learning researchers. This program developed an approach to creative learning that moved beyond the 'bums on seats' approach to performing arts venues and reconceptualised young people as creative makers of art rather than just a convenient audience. This chapter reflects on the process, providing some of the key underpinnings and some of the theoretical orientations that drove the development of the creative leadership in learning program. It describes the approaches undertaken to offer school leaders an opportunity to reflect on their school's approach to creativity and to implementment an approach to creative learning in their schools. The chapter describes the relative roles of the partners in the transformation for a major performing arts venue: from a collection of stages to a making place for young people. The program was developed in the hope that this collection of venues could become a creative resource for young people in Sydney and beyond. The chapter concludes with some reflections on partnerships with large performing arts organisations and academic researchers and reflects on the potential of these kinds of programs to reach new and harder to access young people.

Keywords Partnership · Creative learning · School leadership · Performing arts venue

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1   Introduction

One of the enduring frustrations in our careers as educators has been the way the education sector and the arts sector have often bifurcated, considering their missions as different or unrelated. In Australia this has been particularly pronounced with periods of deep and strong engagement (Hunter 2015) and other times where the sectors would not engage with each other in any way (Anderson 2016). Typically in Australia, partnerships between the arts and education sectors have featured arts in residence approaches as the primary strategy (Hunter 2015). These programs often situate artists (often visual artists) in places of learning, sometimes with specific roles and objectives and at other times as a kind of 'artistic presence' in schools.

2   Sydney Opera House

For centuries before colonisation, a small promontory into the magnificent Sydney harbour had been the focal point for storytelling for the local Aboriginal people, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. Whether by accident or by design, the Sydney Opera House (SOH) continues that tradition on the same land into the twenty-first century. Its extraordinary iconic architecture stands as an international symbol not only of Sydney but of Australia itself. The cultural capital of the building in the imaginary of Australia is richly significant. In this context the invitation by The Opera House to partner with schools as co-creators of an arts based program designed to assist in developing creative leaders, marked a significant shift in the Opera House's approach to schools.

For the Sydney Opera House this desire to engage with schools arose not only from a newly found community spirit. It drew from the hard commercial reality that to many young people the Sydney Opera House was not a place to go, it was a place to admire from afar. This created a mandate for the SOH to radically alter how it could develop relationships with schools that might generate ticket sales. The Opera House's expressed its ambition to re-connect with schools in this way:

> The program aims to shift the way the Sydney Opera House works with the education sector. We will add programs that reach beyond the transactional relationship – where schools purchase tickets, bus in, see the show and then leave again – to a relationship with creativity as the motivating principle. This is a deeper and more meaningful long-term relationship that begins in Primary school and evolves to meet the growing sophistication and complex capabilities of Secondary school students… This Creative Leadership In Learning program will leverage the full potential of what the Sydney Opera House has to offer, to engage with the education sector and encourage schools to see the House as their own dynamic learning environment. (SOH 2015, p. 4)

The Creative Leadership in Learning Program (CLIL) was designed by the Sydney Opera House in a partnership between The University of Sydney, The Catholic Education Office, Parramatta and the Sydney Opera House (SOH). This chapter

explores the design phase of this project within a wider context of Australian arts partnerships.

3   Partnerships in the Arts: The Australian Context

Notwithstanding the ebbs and flows of policy, Arts Education Partnerships have been a dominant feature of modern schooling (Galton 2008). More than a decade ago the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggested that partnerships were an essential feature of a sustainable and productive schooling sector. In the OECD's (2001) future schooling models, Scenario 2b, "Schools as Focused Learning Organisations", partnerships are nominated as one of the crucial features required for the survival of effective schooling. They argue that in these schools:

> Highly demanding curricula [are] the norm for all students. More specialisms catered for (arts, technology, languages, etc.) but a demanding mix of learning expected of all students, including specialists…Team approaches are the norm. Intense attention to new knowledge about the processes of teaching and learning, and the production, mediation and use of knowledge in general.

While there have been some changes to the ways schools operate, the change has been slow and far from paradigm shifting when it comes to partnerships beyond the education sector. They are far from the scenario imagined by the OECD of "a culture of high quality, experimentation, diversity, and innovation" (OECD 2001, p. 90). Creativity learning, while an aim of many of these programs, has also been implemented in an inconsistent manner.

4   Creativity Learning and Schools

Several key international initiatives in how students learn about, through and in a creative environment have brought the profile for creativity in primary, secondary and tertiary education to the fore in the last decade (Davis 2010, p. 31). While there has been a significant shift in the discussion of creativity internationally this has not effectively filtered into the classrooms, curriculum or schooling systems. As Robinson argues, schools often extol the virtues of creativity but are organised against any possibility of it actually emerging: "…if the government were to design an education system to inhibit creativity, it could hardly do better…Governments throughout the world emphasise the importance of creativity, but often what they do in education suppresses it" (1999, p. 41).

A further impetus for the renewed focus on creativity emerged from the Australian Curriculum's nomination of "Critical and Creative thinking" as one of the general capabilities across the curriculum. The Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority explain the inclusion of this capability:

> Responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century – with its complex environmental, social and economic pressures – requires young people to be creative, innovative, enterprising and adaptable, with the motivation, confidence and skills to use critical and creative thinking purposefully (ACARA 2014).

The inclusion of this capability, while encouraging to creativity proponents, still comes without substantial, specific or detailed support for schools to implement creative learning and teaching in their own contexts. One of the key motivations for the CLIL design was to support school leadership teams in the co-construction of creative learning that met the individual contexts of school and made tangible the sometimes vague directions that appear in curriculum and educational policy documents.

The growth in discussions and research around creativity is continuing unabated even in the face of indifference from governments and their education bureaucracies and the reduction in funding to schemes such as Creative Partnerships in the United Kingdom. It may be that this drive is emerging from the corporate sector, spurred on by the Creative Industries and Creative Class discussions (Florida 2002) who are beginning to demand creativity, or perhaps to use another term 'innovation', in the workforce. For educators, marketization and commodification of 'what industry demands' can be problematic (Harris 2014) as it makes the end point of education a job, at the expense of a broad liberal and developmental education. There is however, an opportunity for educators to make a case for creativity being the 'must have' attribute of the twenty-first century for future citizens as well as future workers. A recent research study from Oxford University: "The future of employment: how susceptible are jobs to computerisation?" predicted a major shift in workforce towards creativity and interpersonal skills. The authors concluded:

> Our findings thus imply that as technology races ahead, low-skill workers will reallocate to tasks that are non-susceptible to computerisation –i.e., tasks requiring creative and social intelligence. For workers to win the race, however, they will have to acquire creative and social skills (Frey and Osborne 2013, p. 44).

Recent research from The University of Sydney (Martin et al. 2013) provides further evidence that young people who engage in subjects where creativity is taught explicitly in schools have enhanced outcomes in academic and non-academic spheres. The 3-year Australian Research Council study examined their academic and personal wellbeing outcomes over 2 years. The research found that students who engaged with the arts in schools as active participants – in creative processes – were more likely to do better in academic and social spheres than those who passively consumed the arts. Creativity learning provides new ways of thinking and communicating that provoke ingenuity, imagination and possibility. Creative learning does this by allowing young people access to the tools of creation (Anderson 2012). These tools are central to the creativity learning – but are also vital in a rapidly changing world that will require citizens not just to be consumers of "their" world but also to be able to actively change the world in the face of complex and pressing problems, such as global warming and overpopulation. To make these changes happen in schools will require active, transformational creative leaders and

leadership teams. One framework, the Creative Leadership in Learning Program was developed by Miranda Jefferson and Michael Anderson and has been trialled in several schools. This framework is a foundation of the Creative Leadership in Learning Program used in the Sydney Opera House program.

5 The Creativity Cascade

The creativity cascade is a coherence maker to support the understanding of and scaffold creativity (Jefferson and Anderson 2017). It is not the only way to think about teaching creativity but in the CLIL program we found that it provided an effective way to organise learning and to scaffold creativity learning in schools. In this framework creativity learning is imagined as a metaphorical cascade with four stages that support high-quality learning. We employed the metaphor of the cascade as it suggests a process where one body of water (or understanding) falls (with gravitational force and disciplined but varied form) into the next and into the next. The cascade does not work unless the water flows from one part to the next. The first metaphorical pool of the cascade is "noticing". The cascade as a coherence maker (or learning scaffold) is a pattern of sequenced fundamentals that open up learning and creativity to both be tangible but allowing for playfulness, serendipity, surprise, ambiguity and emergence. The cascade was designed to support schools as they shaped pedagogy and learning experiences that develop skills, understandings and confidence in creative learning. The cascade does not enable creativity learning by itself; it requires from the teachers and students alike wisdom, time, collaboration, trust and a supportive environment.

6 Building Creative Leadership in Schools

If schools and schooling systems accept that creativity is critical to learning and there is ample evidence in curriculum documents that this is the case (Craft 2002, p. 129; Anderson 2013), a shift is required to build understanding amongst leaders and leadership teams about how this capacity can be supported in schools. There is strong evidence of a critical link between transformation and creativity in effective leadership across domains and sectors of the community (Puccio et al. 2011). As Gumsulogou and Ilsev (2009) argue: "Transformational leadership behaviours closely match the determinants of innovation and creativity at the workplace, some of which include vision, support for innovation, autonomy, recognition, and challenge".

The CLIL program for SOH was devised with the twin aims of moving beyond the old artists in schools models and moving to a place where the partnerships were central to the learning rather than peripheral. CLIL also aimed to align the Sydney Opera House with contemporary arts education practice where making art and appreciating the arts are interdependent (Anderson and Jefferson 2009, p. 14).
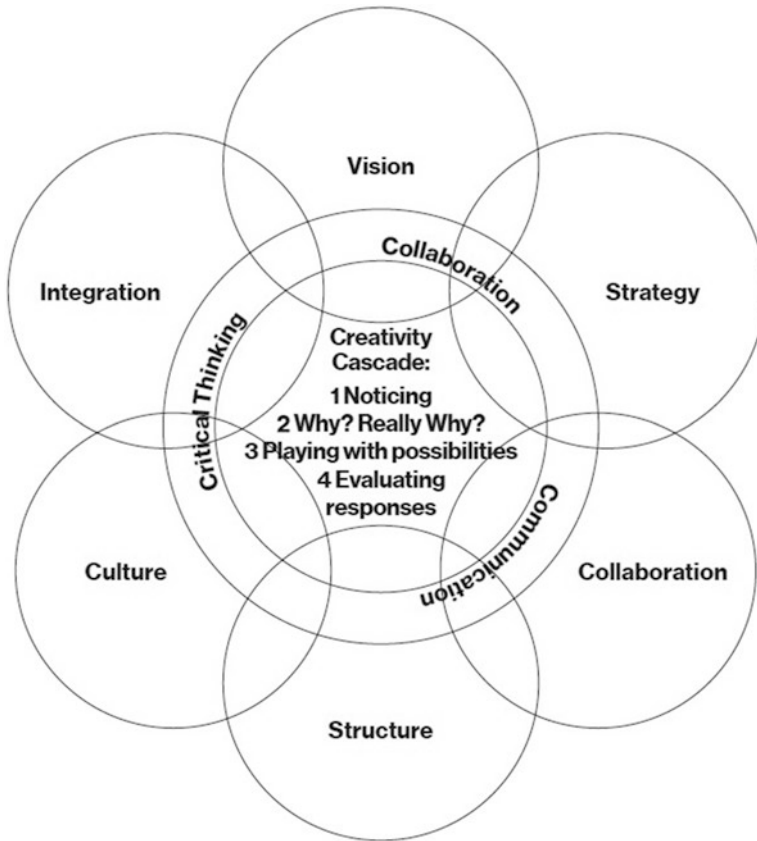
Fig. 1 Creative Leadership in Learning model

What does this mean? Given the multi-arts focus of the SOH's facilities and artistic programming (the SOH is a venue for all of the performing arts, visual arts, architecture etc.) an approach that featured a multi-arts or cross arts approach to the building of creative capacity was most appropriate and aligned with the SOHs Enterprise Strategy. The SOH nominates "Creativity" as one of its six core values (p. 7) and values its "…role as a leader and innovator in arts education, occupying a critical place in the education of NSW children" (p. 17) (Fig. 1).

7   Designing the Creative Leadership in Learning Program

The Creative Leadership in Learning Program was designed to make a distinctive offer to schools that was at its core dialogic. This attempt at poly-vocal interaction between the organising partners (SOH, CEO Parramatta and The University of

Table 1 Design features of the creative leadership in learning program

Design principles	Description and implications
Principal leadership	Schools were accepted to the program on the condition that the principal lead the process. This was a non-negotiable aspect of the programme. The principal then called for expressions of interest from the other members of the teaching staff to join the leadership team
Opt in	All of the participants in the program were volunteers. The design team decided to make the process and approach voluntary to avoid the difficulties associated with participant obstruction and indifference
Structured pedagogical modelling	The content of each creative learning action plan was negotiable. Leadership teams were, however, encouraged to employ structured pedagogical models developed by the project team to deliver the creative learning action plan such as the creativity cascade
Co-construction	All of the creative learning action plans were developed in consultation with the Sydney Opera House teaching artists and the school leadership teams. This was critical to these programs delivering relevant and context informed projects for each partner
Immersive embodied practice	The workshops and learning experiences were designed to use arts-based processes to engage the whole learner. School partners were encouraged to conceive creative learning action plans as immersive, embodied and practical experiences for their students
Triangulated experience	The program was conceived as a triangulated experience between the Sydney Opera House, the teaching artist and the partnership school. In practice this meant each creative learning action plan had to involve a resource from the Sydney Opera House (such as a visit to a show), the involvement of the teaching artist (as a leader of learning and/or professional learning for teachers) and the needs of the school (see co-construction)
Constant evaluation and touch points	Each partnership school 'checked in' digitally through a YouTube video diary and in real life through special 'leadership events'

Sydney) and the school partners did however have the principles outlined in Table 1. The intent was to design a program that provided capacity in creativity learning and leadership by delivering strategies that met the needs of the school directly. In other words this program did not offer a for instance "literacy" program or a "healthy relationships" program. It sought its content from each of the school partners and brought to that content creativity processes to explore the nominated content. Table 1 outlines the design principles that underpinned the Creative Leadership in Learning Program.

The project consisted of several distinct phases. Following initial discussions with the design team, schools opted into the project. The Ignition event held at the Sydney Opera House in September 2015 completed this phase. A ten-week project then occurred in each school and this was completed with a final evaluation afternoon again hosted at the SOH.

8 Ignition Event: Starting the Project

The CLIL project commenced by bringing three of the four schools involved to a full day workshop at the Opera House, in what was called the Ignition event. A further school did not attend the Ignition event but later engaged fully in the project.

On the day the schools sent small leadership teams that comprised teachers, principals and executive teachers (totalling no more than fifteen participants for the day). Four teaching-artists employed by the SOH, Michael Anderson and Miranda Jefferson joined them. The Principals of all schools were present.

Three of the schools were in the Western suburbs of Sydney. This is one of the poorer areas of the city, in which some schools have significant populations of refugee and migrant communities. Rich in their own art forms and cultural practices they however, had little access or engagement in the art forms generally associated with the SOH. One of the principals of the participating schools was an arts educator who had an extensive and lengthy personal relationship with the Opera House. His school is set in a leafy, wealthy monocultural (Anglo) suburb in Sydney's southern suburbs. There was a sense of awe for all the principals in the Opera House, excited by the possibility of partnering with Australia's leading cultural institution. One principal noted, "I was intimidated by that space."

The SOH routinely hosts major international arts events but this was the first time it had invited school principals into the SOH to discuss ways that partnerships could be established. The importance and uniqueness of this initial event was further enhanced for the schools with the Chief Executive of the House opening the day with a half hour presentation addressing how the Opera House considered its engagement with schools as a key part of its 'revitalisation' strategic direction. The event occurred in one of the performance spaces in the building. Access for all the participants to the CEO of one of the most iconic art houses in the world was a rare opportunity for engagement. It signalled to teaching artists and schools the significance of the program for the Opera House. The day's workshop process was videoed and photographed almost continuously for six hours by videographers. It felt to everyone involved that this was an important programme for all the partners involved. It signalled that it wasn't business as usual for the SOH.

Principals and lead teachers were there to learn more about the cascade and its possibilities for driving the relationship with the Opera House. More importantly on the day they were to use the cascade as a framework for making two critical decisions. Each school would decide on the central focus for their work, and spend time with each artist talking about how they might work together to structure a way forward to facilitate a ten week commitment for an engagement with their school.

A series of drama games were used to set up a space for the workshop participants to get to know each other, and to experience the kind of playfulness that would be central to much of the work the artists would engage children in, later in the programme. It also allowed the group the opportunity for risk taking, for noticing,

for asking the why, really why questions. Laughter signalled the beginnings of relationship between the various partners in the room. Then, sitting on the floor of the stage, full of the props and meanings from the previous night's performance, each school used coloured sheets of paper and markers to conceptualise the central idea they wanted an artist to help them use the creativity cascade with, to lead change in their school. Each school sat with their pieces of paper and interviewed each artist in turn about how they thought they might be able to assist them with their goals. Artists had to improvise answers, to think about how they might adapt, shape their artistry to the needs of each school. In the process the goals of each school sharpened in each retelling of what they intended.

It was a complex and multi layered task. Yet it spoke to the heart of the project. The relationship with the SOH was to be guided by the explicit and stated needs of each school. Unlike most theatre–school partnerships where schools opt into pre-determined arts processes and products, this exercise signalled the potential for the project to be owned and driven by the school. Not surprisingly, each school identified different priorities, different ideas about how they might work with both an artist and also the creativity cascade.

The process established negotiation, flexibility, and a joint focus on process and product as the guiding principles for the partnership. Without a fully developed plan, the agreement to structure on the fly, to build and make sense of the work on an ongoing basis allowed for higher levels of ambiguity, in essence allowing things to arise from the work itself. High levels of trust would be vital to the success of a partnership founded in this manner. Trust that the artists could adapt and meet multiple needs in the school, trust that the Opera House could and would meet its multiple promises for different forms and levels of engagement and access.

The pedagogical focus meant that although the schools presented and developed projects based on their own identified needs, the common core of the program became how the artists might facilitate a shift in teaching in these schools, that had relied largely on highly functionalist models of transactional pedagogy.

Each school realised this in different ways with their separate plans reflecting how principals and teachers saw their own particular needs and strengths. The hope for each of the principals was that the teaching artists might model more creative and exciting forms of pedagogy rooted in the theoretical frames developed in the cascade. They also hoped that their schools might look towards the SOH for the professional development of teachers, to shift teachers practice into more responsive, dynamic and imaginative pedagogies that directly met the needs of their students. There was a shared belief that a programme with creativity at its heart might be able to bring about deep change. Principals were also attracted to the idea that the program was negotiated with the school and not imposed. For principals this responded directly to their desire to engage with a program that was sustainable beyond the ten weeks of this program.

Principals were also keen to build the program into existing long-term plans. Principals were attracted into the program because of an existing desire to bring about change and they saw the program as adding value to existing plans. This was, for them all; not about bringing artists in to add curricular value to the classrooms,

but about how they might use the program as part of their desire to bring about substantive transformation in their schools.

Because they saw this programme as part of a wider strategy, they had realistic expectations that the engagement with the SOH would even be central to these plans. In many ways this again freed up and created greater flexibility inside the project. Rather than a deficit model informing the project, i.e. what are we lacking, the principals were interested in how the programme might instead build on the existing strengths and interests of teachers.

At the end of the Ignition event each of the three schools had identified key areas/ issues that they wanted the SOH to engage with through the creativity cascade in their schools. The school missing from the event engaged later in a somewhat truncated process to arrive at their own project.

9 What the Arts Teach: Connecting the Cascade

Elliot Eisner (2002) proposes a list of "ten lessons the Arts teach". He celebrates and advocates for the less tangible, more humanistic qualities of Arts learning. These qualities were present in the cascade framework and particularly in the noticing stage of the cascade.

1. The Arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships.
2. The Arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution.
3. The Arts celebrate multiple perspectives.
4. The Arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity.
5. The Arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know.
6. The Arts teach students that small differences can have large effects.
7. The Arts teach students to think through and within a material.
8. The Arts help children learn to say what cannot be said.
9. The Arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source.
10. The Arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important. (p. 72).

Each school developed its own Creative Learning Action Plan (CLAP). The CLAP outlined a plan for each school to develop opportunities for teachers to notice how these processes might operate in classrooms in ways that facilitated change to teacher student relationships and pedagogical approaches by teachers. Each school's CLAP was designed to meet the schools own identified needs, but in analysing the CLAPS it was clear that schools saw the project as providing teachers and managers with a different way of conceptualising learning and their pedagogical relationships with students. The desire to break away from an increasingly constricted and restricted curriculum that limits deep experiential learning was

palpable in all the schools. The CLAPS were designed by schools and artists to provide all schools with the chance to experiment, play, and to rethink what and how they do things.

With the focus on the cascade the intention was for the artists to model alternative ways of being in classrooms rather than simply demonstrating techniques or strategies for engaging with students. The hope that the principals had was that these alternative ways of being would contribute to the transformation they were seeking. For teaching artists the CLAP was a considerable challenge. It is one thing to bring expertise in to a classroom in order to provide the aesthetic knowledge to help build skills in arts making. And this perhaps is the most comfortable space for teaching artists to occupy in schools. Ironically however, the schools at the Ignition event were looking to non-trained teachers to provide professional development not only in arts making, but in dynamic pedagogies. Andy Hargreaves (2003) claims the artistry of teaching has been replaced by a dull technicist approach that is driven by testing and compliance. He argues: 'instead of fostering creativity and ingenuity, more and more school systems have become obsessed with imposing and micromanaging curriculum uniformity. In place of ambitious missions of compassion and community, schools and teachers have been squeezed into the tunnel vision of test scores, achievement targets and league tables of accountability' (Hargreaves 2003, p. 1). This approach is characterised by over planning, a focus on testing and dehumanised relationships. What was evident at the Ignition event was that what principals wanted was for the SOH model to facilitate alternative ways for teaching to happen in classrooms. Rather than anything new, the artists were reminding schools of what was still possible in the neo liberal twenty-first century classroom.

10 Creative Leadership and Learning: A Discussion

In many ways the CLIL program is a bold forging into the unknown for a place like the Sydney Opera House. It has several risks that are tied up with the difficulties in engaging and supporting multiple 'players'. On one view, however, large cultural providers such as the SOH no longer have a choice. Dwindling ticket sales have created a crisis of identity for many cultural centres and in doing so have prompted them to seek more relational engagements with their communities. The planning phase of the CLIL described in this chapter constitutes an authentic attempt to change that relationship. The program described here has been a learning experience for all of the partners. One of the key challenges we have discovered in this process is that of navigating between the needs of schools and the needs of a high status cultural organisation with scant experience in off-site programming. The newness of the relationship also means at times that neither partner has fully recognised the strengths which each brings to the partnership. The redesign of this program will need to attend to the tendency for the partners not to fully understand each other. This, of course is a common experience of partnership

relationships and the experience of this pilot program will provide many instances of misunderstanding that can be used to reshape and redesign the program. These are, however, common issues in the development and delivery of any pilot program and the reason why pilots exist. One early impression we have is that there is a strong need on behalf of cultural institutions and schools to have a more meaningful and a more 'modern' engagement where there is a deep perception of each other's needs and strengths. The SOH, The University of Sydney and the partner schools have begun changing the game so that they might be changed institutions as a result. While there is much further to travel on this particular journey there are signs that creativity is returning to be part of the discussion in schools where it may not have been in the past.

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