Chapter 4
Who gets to be creative in class? Creativity as a matter of social justice in secondary English lessons

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Abstract This chapter explores how teachers in three secondary schools construct creativity, individually and within the context of shared practice in their own institutions. The particular focus is on how constructions of creativity are shaped by national frameworks of curriculum, assessment and accountability, and how these vary from school to school. This is situated in a period of political transition in the English school curriculum (2010–2015), during which the National Curriculum (which had previously contained 'creativity' as one of its four key concepts) was replaced by a curriculum that made no mention of creativity. The chapter examines the role of policy in the construction of creativity in classrooms, analysing how teachers might resist official policy in the interests of their vision for their subject, and questioning the role policy can play in the implementation of 'exhortative' policies about difficult to measure concepts such as creativity, compared to 'imperative' policies that relate directly to accountability in schools. The chapter constructs creativity itself as a material resource central to the teaching of language and literature, with its relative levels of distribution within different schools and to different students a matter of social justice and equity.

Introduction

This chapter draws on doctoral research study into how English[1] teachers in three different secondary schools constructed 'creativity' and how this fed into enactments of creativity and creative practices in their classrooms. The research formed the basis of a Doctorate in Education, completed with the Institute for Policy Studies

[1] 'English' here refers to school subject English as practised in secondary schools in England. This encompasses the study of both English Language and English Literature.

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in Education (IPSE) team at London Metropolitan University. In keeping with the institute's ethos, it was positioned within a model of educational research that sought to interrogate the social justice implications of different policies and practices. This chapter is concerned specifically with those implications: interrogating how creativity was constructed and distributed as a matter of equity in relation to different types of school and within different policy demands.

I begin by outlining the research's design, explaining how schools were identified for small-scale comparative case study work. I then explore the research and policy contexts within which it was carried out, outlining the position of creativity within policy discourse as it related to school English teaching. I moves on to describe an 'epistemology of creativity', a construction of knowledge created specifically for the research, that drew on several theorists who themselves have engaged with creativity as part of their work. This epistemology situates the work squarely within a notion of the 'public good', establishing a framework for seeing creativity as central to possibilities for knowledge-generation and agency (Freire 1970; Williams 1977). The chapter concludes by summarising the social justice implications of how creativity was practised and distributed in the sample schools.

Research design

The empirical research discussed in this chapter drew on data produced by interviews with 17 teachers in three different secondary schools, selected because of their different institutional structures, terms of governance, geographical locations, broad educational aims, and student bodies. One (Windhover[2]) was a prestigious private, fee-paying school[3] in an affluent satellite town of London, one (Archford) an inner London state comprehensive with a mixed intake containing substantial numbers of both middle- and working-class children, and one (Bloomington) a state comprehensive of predominantly working-class children, situated on the outskirts of London. Of prime concern when choosing the schools was that the student intakes demonstrated considerable differences in terms of social class. The schools were all mixed in terms of gender intake and, as in keeping with the superdiverse population of London and its environs, all three schools contained students from a wide range of national and ethnic groups. The research was insufficiently small in scope, however, to be able to factor in all of these multiple variables.

The research was designed to be at one and the same time the study of a single case and a comparative study of three cases: the former because it treated the English

[2] Pseudonyms are used for all three schools; all attempts have been made to keep the identity of the schools anonymous.

[3] The high level of fees at many private schools in England automatically excludes the majority of children from attending. The fees at Windhover are currently about three times as high as the average funding per pupil in secondary state schools (£19,000 per pupil per annum, compared to £6300 per pupil per annum).

teachers as a collective professional body, engaged in practising the same subject in three different locations (Simons 2009, p. 29); the latter because it treated them as members of discrete institutions, each with its own practices and demands (Denscombe 2010, p. 55). A case study approach is open to the criticism that it is too small in scale to make credible generalisations. However, it is possible to argue that generalisations hold validity so long as researchers strive to offer a sufficiently rich response 'to help readers make their own inferences' and also 'situate their work within other relevant examples of research and theory' (Knight 2002, p. 46). This approach allowed for an element of comparative work across the schools, with a particular focus on inequities in the way that creativity was enacted.

The research differed from previous studies in its focus on the construction of creativity in secondary English classrooms within a wider body of work about educational rationing (Fraser 1997; Gillborn and Youdell 1999). Creativity was constructed in the research design not just as a method of teaching and learning (Craft et al. 2001; Robinson and Aronica 2015), but as a material resource held in language (Carter 2004; Blommaert 2010) and literature (Attridge 2004), and an important element of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990 [1970]), with the potential for teachers to draw on it restricted or enabled in different measures according to the institutional pressures within which they worked. In this sense, the inclusion of teacher responses from a private school was particularly significant. Often, Stephen Ball (2017, p. 169) pointed out, 'policy may be looking in the wrong place' in 'addressing itself to social disadvantage as a free-standing problem'. He explained that this was the case because:

> Inequality is also produced and reproduced relationally by the actions and strategies of the socially advantaged to maintain and enhance their advantages. (Ball 2017, p. 169)

If, as Ball stated, the structures at work in state schools acted to deepen 'the relationship between education policy and social class and the reproduction of social inequalities and privilege and disadvantage' (p. 7), through restricting access to socially desirable resources such as creativity, then, relationally, does it simultaneously enable students in private schools to accumulate more of the same resource?

Research context

The research project was situated in a moment of transition in England in terms of educational policy. It was conceived in 2010 when a Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition (the Coalition) entered government, displacing a Labour government (New Labour) that had been in power between 1997 and 2010. The interviews were carried out in June and July 2013, 2 months before statutory changes to the curriculum legislated for by the Coalition, which had a direct impact on the shape of secondary English teaching, came into force.

Creativity was central to New Labour educational policy (Jones 2009; Hall 2010), yet it was largely excluded from Coalition policy documentation. This alone

made it a significant concept to study. Why was a concept given prominence by one administration subsequently marginalised and even discredited by another? This contrast suggested that the word has a rhetorical force (Banaji and Burn 2010) beyond its literal meanings, acting as a site of contestation for different approaches to education, both pedagogical and ideological (Marshall 2001).

This significance was particularly pertinent when looking at English teaching. Large numbers of English teachers value the centrality of creativity to their subject practice (Marshall 2000; Goodwyn 2003). Creativity was (and still is), in and of itself, a field of considerable interest at tertiary level in relation to language (Carter 2004), literature (Kearney 1988, 2002; Armstrong 2000; Attridge 2004), and the interplay of the two (Swann et al. 2011). In exploring English teachers' constructions of creativity, then, the research was designed to raise questions about the role of policy on teaching practices, the agency teachers have in deciding what and how to teach, and the possibilities for particular linguistic and literary practices in their classrooms. This did not just include the role played by policy directly relating to creativity, but by a whole raft of measures acting on (primarily state) schools that led to them working in a culture of all-pervasive 'performativity' (Ball 2003b) and 'accountability' (Hutchings 2015; Kulz 2017; see also Chapter 3, Hutchings 2021a). It also allowed for similar questions to be raised about what happened in private schools when these measures either did not apply, or produced different kinds of pressures and outcomes, ones that might, for example, focus on students achieving the highest examination results, rather than meeting particular standards relating to levels of literacy.

Policy context

Creativity might seem to be a term that exists on the peripheries of policy discourse. Indeed, there are periods of time when it is entirely missing (McCallum 2018). There is some logic to this, given that it is a term generally used in the abstract, with the potential to be applied to multiple fields (Banaji and Burn 2010), and difficult to define with precision (Pope 2005). Despite the relative scarcity of explicit references, this chapter seeks to establish the significant role it has played in policy discourse for over four decades, often acting as a site of contestation for different approaches to education, both pedagogical and ideological, particularly in English teaching (Marshall 2001). The extended timescale is to establish the continuity in policy constructions of creativity.

The chapter also aims to demonstrate that it is a word which 'speaks to professional longings' (Jones 2015, p. 174). Such longings offer alternative possibilities in the face of the anxieties around performativity and accountability discussed above. They can therefore challenge policy as well as being constructed within its parameters, proof that policy on the ground is a question of 'process … involving negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups who may be outside the

formal machinery of official policy making' (Ozga 2000, p. 2). Policy is only ever a part of what teachers do (Ball et al. 2012, p. 6).

Policy about creativity

In its first policy incarnations, creativity appeared almost exclusively as part of a 'discourse of derision', a term coined to describe the process by which educational policies and practices that seek to promote social justice are discredited by using some of their key terms against them (Kenway 1987; Ball 2006). An overview of policy literature, however, reveals continuity in the construction of creativity as it related to English teaching, despite this apparent contrast. Specifically, it shows that both the mainstream political left and right, as represented by the Labour and Conservative parties respectively, constructed creativity in English in ways that suggested it ran counter to effective learning.

The disparagement of creativity was embedded in *The Black Papers* (Cox and Dyson 1971), the first significant example of 'the discourse of derision' and one of the first documents from the political right to address educational policy. Creativity in English, and its attendant terms such as 'self-expression' and 'imagination', were linked directly to perceptions of wider social disorder and moral decay taking place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as in this polemical piece addressing a supposed decline in educational standards:

> The deterioration is most marked in English composition. Here the vogue is all for 'creativity'. Bad spelling, bad grammar, and the crudest vulgarisms are no longer frowned upon, but freely tolerated. Instead of accuracy, the teacher aims at 'self-expression'; instead of clear and logical thought or precise description of facts, he – and still more often she – seeks to foster what is called 'imagination'. At the same time parents and members of the public at large are beginning to wonder whether the free discipline, or lack of discipline, in the new permissive school may not largely be responsible for much of the subsequent delinquency, violence and general unrest that characterise our permissive society. (Burt 1971, p. 60)

The inclusion of this essay in the *Black Papers*, in hindsight, seems startling, given the casual way in which the author earlier used a deeply offensive, racially charged quotation to offer an alternative educational approach to one that he is attacking. The words are not his own, but they are used to suggest that educational success (and, by implication, societal order) best comes from the insistence on deeply repressive forms of hard labour for all students. The quotation is as follows: 'Make them work like n****rs,' says the headmaster in Ian Hay's short story, 'that's education in a nutshell' (Burt 1971, p. 55).[4] When constructed in this way, it becomes clear that placing controls on creativity goes hand in hand with wider societal controls, ones that entrench prejudice, intolerance and deep-seated social subjugation.

[4] The original chapter in the Black Papers printed the word in full, with no consideration for its offensive nature.

New Labour policy (1997–2010), in contrast to a Conservative tradition established by the *Black Papers*, ostensibly embraced rather than rejected creativity. It was still constructed, though, in terms of social control and order. *All Our Futures* (NACCCE 1999), the foundational document for the government's approach, opened with then prime minister Tony Blair stating:

> Our aim must be to create a nation where the creative talents of all the people are used to build a true enterprise economy for the twenty-first century – where we compete on brains, not brawn. (Blair, quoted in NACCCE 1999, p. 5)

Creativity was harnessed to economic competitiveness throughout: creativity and creating a nation, in Blair's terms, required conformity to an economic imperative. Far from being an 'experimental and de-stabilising force' (Sefton-Green et al. 2011, p. 2), creativity was instead co-opted into New Labour's form of neoliberalism (Jones 2009, p. 24). Creativity pertaining to English, though, was notably absent. Not only did the subject receive very little attention in a lengthy document (Marshall 2001, p. 63; McCallum 2018, p. 55), it was also constructed in ways that separated it from creative activity. For example, it posed the question, 'Isn't an emphasis on creativity and culture a distraction from the core concerns with literacy and numeracy?',[5] answering by explaining that it was 'not advocating creative and cultural education as alternatives to literacy and numeracy, but as equally relevant to the needs of this and future generations' and that 'high standards of literacy … are important in themselves' (NACCCE 1999: p. 14). The separation of literacy and creativity was mirrored by another significant document influencing New Labour's policy on creativity, *The Creative Age: Knowledge and skills for the new economy* (Seltzer and Bentley 1999). Also linking creativity to economic competitiveness, it called for a radical restructuring of the curriculum, insisting that 'rather than trying to increase skills levels through conventional qualifications, government should take a different approach to educating for creativity', while simultaneously asserting that 'basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and core subject disciplines will continue to be important' (p. 10).

The similarities in how creativity was constructed in relation to English by all mainstream political parties continued during the time in which the research project was carried out and written up. Both Labour and Coalition policy makers separated creativity from ideas about learning language. For example, then Coalition Minister for Education, Michael Gove argued that 'you cannot be creative unless you understand how to construct sentences, what words mean, how to understand grammar' (Gove 2013c). Then shadow Minister for Education, Tristram Hunt (2015), in a book review, recognised the need for a response to an 'exam factory' model of

[5] Literacy here refers to the development of a set of language skills integral to competency in reading and writing. They are part of school subject English, though by no means inclusive of all that the subject offers. The use of 'literacy' rather than 'English' by policy makers is indicative of the wider discourse of placing limitations on the subject (and on creativity) explored in this chapter as a whole. For a full discussion of the relationship between English and literacy see Green 2006.

schooling that emphasised testing 'at the expense of teaching children how to employ their natural creativity' but went on to state that:

> … the uncomfortable truth is that there are also large swaths of the English education system that require more not less uniformity. If all our pupils could reach some basic minimum standards of literacy and numeracy by the time they left primary schools, our educational attainment as a nation would be markedly higher... we always need to guard against the soft bigotry of low expectations: the worrying trend of play and expression being adequate for working-class pupils, while leaving the tough stuff … for their better off peers. (Hunt 2015)

The phrase 'the soft bigotry of low expectations' drew on the discourse of derision used previously by politicians, both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The exact same phrase was first used by former US Republican President, George W. Bush (2000). It was then picked up in policy statements by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education 2010–2014 (Collins 2013) and his successor, Nicky Morgan (Cassidy 2015). Rhetorically it created a false dichotomy between creativity and literacy skills and suggested that engaging in the former at the expense of the latter was a matter of social justice. This was in spite of evidence to the contrary. A PISA[6] report comparing educational performances across nations, found that the types of activities often associated with creativity in the classroom (such as group work, discussion) were less common in English schools than in other countries regularly cited by politicians as having a more 'traditional' approach. For example, students in English schools were more likely to have to learn material by heart and to work towards specific objectives, and less likely to work in groups than those in Singapore and Hong Kong (McInerney 2013). The report identified one significant exception to this trend: 'Private school pupils reported higher rates of being asked to express opinions in class, completing group work and having their teacher relate learning to their lives.'

The contradictions about the role of creativity in English teaching under New Labour extended into documents outlining and surveying classroom practice. For example, creativity had a prominent place in the *National Curriculum programme of study for English* (QCDA 2007), yet an Ofsted report into teaching that took place under that curriculum, *Moving English Forward* (Ofsted 2012),[7] identified a lack of creativity in the majority of lessons observed. Thus, the *National Curriculum* stated that students should be given opportunities to 'use inventive approaches to making meaning, taking risks, playing with language and using it to create new effects' as well as 'making fresh connections between ideas, experiences, texts and words, drawing on a rich experience of language and literature'; in contrast, *Moving English Forw*ard identified that teachers were 'nervous about taking risks and being inventive' (QCDA 2007, p. 45) in the majority of lessons observed.

[6] PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment, is an international study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in member and non-member nations intended to evaluate educational systems by measuring 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance on mathematics, science, and reading.

[7] While the report was published during the period of the Coalition administration, schools were still following New Labour policies at the time of the report.

The mismatch between curriculum directives and actual practice was indicative of the contradictory policy messages aimed at English teachers during this period. The practices identified as restrictive in *Moving English Forward* in 2012 were the very same ones promoted by the *National Literacy Strategy* between 2002 and 2008. While non-statutory, the Strategy's *Framework for teaching English* (DfES 2002), which promoted a literacy rather than English agenda (Green 2006), became a *de facto* curriculum, with schools criticised in Ofsted reports if they did not implement it effectively.

Policies limiting creativity

The legislation mandating Ofsted inspections is an example of 'imperative' as opposed to 'exhortative' policy (Ball et al. 2012). Directed towards accountability and performativity measures, imperative policies are enforced rigorously via rigid state mechanisms. Exhortative policies, on the other hand, tend to be more 'writerly' (*ibid.*, p. 94) in that they offer a degree of 'creativity and sense-making' in their implementation. Imperative policies are prioritised over exhortative ones, making it important for any research to look at both side-by-side: in this case, for example, how did exhortative policies of creativity sit within imperative policies about performance standards?

Imperative policies have had a distorting influence on school practice over the past two decades or so. The 'terrors of performativity' (Ball 2003b) and accountability as measured by high-stakes testing (Hutchings 2015; see also Chapter 3, Hutchings 2021a) have resulted in teaching that has focused on tests and mandated outcomes at the exclusion of broader educational aims and experiences. Hutchings, for example, found that in a culture of high-stakes testing in England, teachers made 'less time for investigation, creative activity, play, reflection, stories' (2015, p. 46) even as they valued all of these, and that there was 'a tendency for lessons to be uniform and not involve creative and investigative activities' (p. 66). Similar findings have appeared in research in other countries. An international literature review for use in the Australian school system found that the dominant conclusion to be drawn from a number of studies was that 'high-stakes testing discourages teachers from being creative, and instead encourages didactic teach-to-the-test approaches that reduce motivation' (Lobascher 2011, p. 14).

An epistemology of creativity

The research drew on a range of theorists who have applied the concept of creativity to the construction of knowledge itself, primarily relating it to a process of 'becoming', whereby knowledge is never fixed, can never definitively be described. Their various theories were combined into an *epistemology of creativity*. At the heart of

this was Raymond Williams' (1977) construction of creativity as relating both to deliberate acts and the unforeseen consequences of those acts. In his words, 'creativity and social self-creation are … known and unknown events' and it is 'from grasping the known that the unknown – the next step, the next work – is conceived' (p. 212).

Epistemologically, then, creativity provided the means to attempt to give voice to, or explain, emergent forms discernible in what Williams called 'structures of feeling'. These could be present in 'the relatively simple and direct practice of everyday communication' (p. 211) or in 'new articulations … which … reach beyond their time and occasion' (p. 211). Significantly, they were opposed to simple reproductive forms of social practice and so offered a challenge to the status quo without making grand and unsubstantiated claims about what might be to follow.

The reflexivity built into Williams' work was given further substance by drawing on various theories of affect. In particular, these allowed for recognition that a concept like creativity, that tends to gather positive emotions around it, might also lead to negative feelings. For while creativity points towards further possibilities, they cannot always be acted upon, particularly when they come up against powerful, dominant discourses. This was a very useful perspective when considering the emotions that form around teachers' constructions of creativity. What emotions did it produce when talking about how they were unable to act on their own ideas and beliefs? And what did it lead them to talk about besides creativity? In this context, concepts such as Laurent Berlant's 'cruel optimism' (2011), Kathleen Woodward's (2009) 'statistical panic' and 'bureaucratic rage' and Sara Ahmed's 'hap' (2010) took on relevance. The first two attempted to articulate feelings that cluster around a sense of frustration brought about by contemporary existence. Ahmed argued that 'hap' was a more useful word than 'happiness', as it recognised the impossibility of assuming that only positive emotions can be transformative, or even desirable. In her construction, negative emotions are not 'simply reactive … but creative responses to histories that are unfinished' (Ahmed, p. 217).

Paulo Freire's (1970) constructions of 'banking' (pp. 52–6) as opposed to 'problem-solving' (pp. 64–5) forms of pedagogy completed the epistemology. Banking forms of pedagogy rely on the simple transmission of knowledge, one of the means by which dominant groups maintain power; problem-solving forms encourage people to bring learning into their own realm of knowledge and to reflect and act on it in a process of *praxis*. Thus, the world is no longer 'static' but 'in process, in transformation' (p. 65). Freire drew a direct link between pedagogy and creativity, saying that 'banking education inhibits creativity' while 'problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality' (p. 65). Authentic existence, he added, is only possible when people are 'engaged in inquiry and creative transformation' (p. 65).

Creativity and social justice

Some of the significant empirical data gathered for the research is summarised here. It suggests significant differences across the three schools, with the biggest difference being the contrast between practices at the private school Windhover (W) and the two state schools, Archford (A) and Bloomington (B). These differences, in turn, raise questions about the distribution of creativity in English lessons in English schools and how these relate to notions of social justice and the public good.

Teachers across all three schools constructed creativity as a concept in similar ways. They all valued its connotations of originality, independence, self-expression, imagination, adventurousness, and possibility. As a whole, these concepts could be seen to construct learning and knowledge as a process of *becoming* (Freire 1970) and of possibility (Jones 2009). The terms referred to were firmly consistent with ideas about what constitute the process of linguistic and literary study (Applebee 1996). They were also consistent with socially just notions of what the subject could and should do to develop the learning and thinking of young people in equitable ways. Similarities between the conceptual constructions of creativity across all three schools suggested a shared understanding of the term's potential significance to English teaching.

Significant contrasts began to emerge when teachers were required to articulate how they implemented creativity within their own lessons. Teachers at Archford and Bloomington, the two state schools, felt limited in opportunities to bring creativity into their classrooms. They attributed this in large part to accountability pressures. These came from both within and beyond the school. Individual teachers within an institution were expected to achieve particular results for their students; these pressures, in turn, stemmed from central government requirements for schools to publish examination results in publicly available league tables comparing all schools, and from Ofsted's inspection criteria making judgements in relation to these results. Edie (A10),[8] for example, felt that the school's concerns were 'more about the results, the attainment of the students' than 'the experiences'. Stephen (B20) spoke explicitly about how particular requirements of the GCSE examinations[9] 'actually stop creativity' and how 'creativity gets squeezed out of exams, because it's hard to measure'. Simone (B1) felt that examination pressures made her rush through work, not leaving time for creativity. She said, 'I feel like I'm hurrying along, that I'm really rushing my students through coursework and through exam skills and it's just really relentless.'

Teachers at the private school, Windhover, did not feel the same pressures. They recognised the potential for examinations to limit creativity to the extent that they 'have become the be-all and end-all through league tables and the growing pressure

[8] Pseudonyms are used for all teachers who took part in the study. Capital letter refers to school, number to the teacher's years of teaching experience.

[9] GCSE: General Certificate of Education, nationally administered examinations taken by 16-year-olds in England.

on university entrance at sixth form' (Neil, W25). However, they felt that these limitations could be circumvented. In large part, this possibility was constructed as lying in the hands of teachers themselves. Alan (W40) commented that 'often, if you want to be creative as an English teacher, it has to be in spite of the exam syllabuses, not because of them.' He thought that 'it's important to circumvent the exams.'

Several Windhover teachers made their statements about examinations and creativity from a position of privileged knowledge. Ewen (W37), Matt (W20) and Neil (W25) were all principal examiners for various awarding bodies and examination papers. This gave them an air of confidence in what they said. When Ewen was asked if 'the exam system restricts creativity', he disagreed and instead identified creativity as a quality of good responses. 'At its best, the examination system produces some superb answers [which are] articulate, fluent, well-paragraphed, well informed and imaginative.' He implied that creativity was the responsibility of the teacher and that where students weren't able to demonstrate creativity they had been taught poorly, in a uniform fashion. He contrasted 'the dull stuff where I can hear the teacher reading notes' with an approach 'where I can hear something from the discussion they've had in class where they've really got into it and got enthusiastic about a text.' In similar fashion, Neil suggested that some teachers deliberately avoided teaching certain aspects of exam syllabuses in creative ways. He gave as an example an A Level[10] coursework option that required the study of three texts. It was, he said, 'deliberately designed to be freer and more open to interpretation by teachers and students, effectively as an individual research task.' Teachers were encouraged to 'provoke, stimulate, nudge candidates to choose what they want, to choose their own texts, the directions they are going to study, the research they are going to do,' resulting in them getting 'a sense of academic creativity'. The reality in many schools was, in his judgement, very different:

> Of course, a lot of schools won't do that because they see it as dangerous and uncontrollable. Many schools will decide on three texts that they are going to teach and they will teach them and everyone will do the same question.

The phrase 'dangerous and uncontrollable' suggested that Neil felt that in many schools there was a fear of stepping outside tightly prescribed boundaries and a general discourse of compliance. It suggested that this was not the case for teachers at Windhover, though: they felt able to offer a version of English that included creativity as a matter of course. It was a version that highlighted their own subject expertise and insider knowledge of the examination system, and which served to differentiate their approach from that of other schools, thus entrenching the types of 'relational' differences often established between private schools and others (Ball 2017, p. 169). It was a version only made possible because their school sat outside the system of accountability measures by which state schools were judged.

Creativity and creative practice were in limited supply in Archford and Bloomington schools. Mark (B8) visibly winced when asked to describe a lesson he

[10] A Levels: nationally administered subject examinations taken by 18-year-olds in England.

recently taught or observed that was creative. 'It's a tough one,' he said, 'give me a minute – it will be really hard to think of one.' His colleague, Sally (B40) to the same request, simply said, 'I can't.' Jo (A25), also failed to come up with anything: 'I'm just trying to think, I'm a bit blank on that,' she said. Edie (A10) was visibly panicked. 'Okay, let me think about that for a minute,' she said. 'Oh God – Oh God – I don't think this is going to be particularly creative but ….'.Edie did eventually come up with her own example. However, the examples drawn on by three of her colleagues, Rhonda (A1), Samantha (A12) and Lee (A5), were all from lessons that they observed others teach or taught themselves a long time ago. Rhonda, for example, described a lesson that she taught more than 12 months previously, while she was a trainee teacher. Lee described an A Level lesson taught by a colleague, and Samantha recounted her role in supporting another teacher's creative writing lesson. In a similar act of displacement from everyday practice, Stan (B3), drew on a taster lesson he taught to primary school students visiting his school as his example. As such, this lesson was not subject to the school's usual requirements about teaching in a particular way. He talked about the freedom that came with this, articulating it as 'knowing that we don't have to get any work out of them at the end of the day,' and being confident that 'that's allowed.'

In contrast, creative practices at Windhover were transformational in nature. When asked for examples of creativity in their lessons, the school's teachers often talked about 'recreative' or 'transformational' writing (Pope 2005; Knights and Thurgar-Dawson 2006). This involved students demonstrating understanding of a text by rewriting it in some way. Bill (W6), for example, talked about how, when students were studying Wilfred Owen's war poetry, 'along the way they wrote their own war poems from a particular perspective,' and, similarly, retold Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* 'from a modern perspective – the Dustbinman's Tale and things like that.' Rowena (W6), talking about teaching the novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, explained how she guided students 'to do activities where they had to write from the mother's perspective, or from the father's perspective at the end of the story, or even write as Christopher after the end of the story.' Windhover teachers were also keen advocates of a recreative response option in various GCSE and A Level examinations. Matt (W20) said that 'we're very keen to maintain recreative responses as a way of responding to a literary text,' and Neil (W25), speaking in his capacity as a principal examiner, talked about an optional recreative task at A Level, which he had 'been pushing schools towards for a long, long time, but meeting quite a lot of resistance.'

Examples of recreative practice were mentioned by the state school teachers, though none did it as an examination option.[11] The only examples cited related to GCSE examination texts (Windhover's related to texts outside prescribed syllabuses) and the work was done to develop knowledge for the examination. Specifically

[11] Public examination syllabuses for English have some limited opportunities for students to demonstrate their critical understanding of a text by offering a 'recreative' or 'transformative' response.

students role-played characters in *An Inspector Calls*. Thus, even when they were performing different identities, they were still ones linked to the official curriculum.

Meanwhile pupils whose parents could afford the high school fees at Windhover were performing as dustbinmen among other things. Drawing on recreative practices enabled them to bring knowledge into their own sphere of being, rather than passively accepting existing formations (Freire 1970). Permitted to do it far more than their state school counterparts, creativity, it might be argued, was constructed here as the means by which one social group reinforced its privileged position by enabling its young people to engage with a wide range of linguistic resources, while relationally those in the two state schools were denied choice and experimentation.

Talking about creativity generated strong feelings, with several state school teachers expressing negative emotions in their voices and comments. These emotions were often in relation to frustrations at not being able to bring creativity into lessons. In particular, this was the case with older teachers in the state schools, who compared what they felt able to bring to lessons at the time of the interviews with how they taught earlier in their careers. Sally (B40) provided a pertinent example. One week from full retirement at the time of her interview, she valued creativity enough to say that it marked 'the difference between really being alive and just being dead.' She recounted how early in her career she taught in ways that drew on her own experience of the subject, involving a high degree of creativity. She linked this closely to issues of social justice, so that talking about creativity led her to talk about her broader motivations for becoming a teacher, which involved wanting 'to actually change society in a way – to introduce new thoughts about society and how we relate to each other.' Her vision for creativity fed directly into ideas about young people – and society as a whole – taking, in Williams' terms, 'the next step' (1977, p. 212):

> I think you should be encouraging children to think for themselves, to see things from other people's perspectives, which is where your imagination comes in – if you're just reinforcing the status quo you're not getting – I mean sometimes it's uncomfortable getting kids to challenge things, but I think … you're not going to get a just society, a democratic society, by just feeding kids ideas about what they should think and how they should react to things.

Her words constructed the current system as denying students the prospect of *becoming*, and so of significant changes to dominant discourses. She expressed this by explaining that currently there was a focus on 'the mechanics of life' rather than offering students 'a different dimension to life'. She ended her interview with anger demonstrably in her tone, as she drew on a literary allusion to E. M. Forster's *Howard's End*, invoking a family in the novel who only saw the world in functional terms, to illustrate her frustrations and fears:

> I really don't want all Wilcoxes in this world and the Wilcoxes are on the increase particularly in Conservative Britain. They're not interested in the other things of life really, and what makes it more enjoyable. No one thinks about that, what is an enjoyable experience, and for children often when they're creative that's when it's most enjoyable – they're creating something. If you drive creativity out of the curriculum – and that's what people don't understand with English in particular – just this functional thing, I mean what world do those people live in where they think those sorts of things are useful?

Conclusions

Significant issues were raised by this research into how creativity was distributed in English. While too small in scale to be definitive, the differences between constructions of creativity in the private school compared to the two state schools were large enough to warrant some generalisations being speculated upon when placed within broader patterns drawn from additional research. These included a strong case for creativity in English as, itself, a matter of social justice. Creative classrooms, the study suggested, were places of 'becoming', where students were able to take on new voices and roles, and to explore different possibilities. Classrooms where creativity was suppressed were places where the focus was driven by final examination outcomes, with limited opportunities for thinking beyond tightly prescribed ways of being. These tightly controlled classrooms, counter to notions put forward by a 'discourse of derision', were found in the state sector. Classrooms in the private school were much more likely to draw on creative practices, so suggesting a construction of creativity which relationally reinforced existing advantages.

Teachers themselves in the state schools did not seek to place limitations on creative practice in their lessons. Their constructions of creativity corresponded closely to those of their private school counterparts, both in terms of its formation and its value to the subject. In articulating their inability to put their beliefs about creativity into practice, they revealed the degree to which their practice was led by a pressures to conform to pressures of performativity and accountability, against their better professional judgement. That the private school teachers did not feel these pressures can in part be explained by the fact that their schools sat outside the state school accountability system. However, their students still, by and large, sat the same set of public examinations. Clearly, then, they did not feel any incompatibility between teaching for and through creativity and high academic attainment. Such a consideration makes the difference between the distribution of creativity in the state and private schools all the more pertinent: it would seem, that in some way, policy was acting to constrict access to creativity for state school students, compelling teachers to teach in a particular way. Students' thinking and possibilities for 'becoming' were being limited, while in the private school they were being encouraged. Existing social hierarchies were not just being entrenched, but potentially widened, with state school students locked in a kind of educational stasis, while the private school ones extended the possibilities for who they were and what they could become.

The research, then, has significant implications for notions of a 'public good'. The frustrations voiced by state school teachers were not replicated by private school ones. Policy, then, was having a direct impact on their professional satisfaction and judgement. In turn, the restrictions under which they felt compelled to teach were being passed on to their students, so limiting their experiences of language and literature, their possibilities and how they related to their wider lives. No such restrictions were being placed on the private school students. We can only speculate as to what students in the different schools felt about this, but we can infer that the frustrations of the state school teachers were being passed on to their

students, while the private school students were benefiting from their teachers' confidence in engaging in creative practices.

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