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Creativity and whole school change: An investigation of English headteacher practices

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Abstract Schools in England have been required to adopt and adapt an ongoing series of policy initiatives: some however are offered on an 'opt-in' basis. This paper examines one such 'offer,' that of Creative Partnerships, a programme which provides schools in designated deprived areas the opportunity to work with creative practitioners in order to change both classroom practice and whole schools. We report here on the snapshot phase of a national study, using a corpus of multi-method qualitative data from 40 schools. We suggest that headteachers saw different opportunities in the CP offer but what actually happened in the school related to three interwoven strands: the situatedness of the school, the headteacher's stance towards change, and the architecture of change management. Our analysis, which highlights the ways in which many of the schools were unable to 'spread and embed' the pedagogical changes supported through CP, suggests that the majority of heads could benefit from involvement in explicit discussion about 'unofficial'—and more democratic—approaches to leading and managing change.

Keywords Creativity · Change management · Leadership · England

In an effort to maintain the impetus for, and pace of, educational change the English New Labour government has produced a continuing flow of initiatives. As Ball (2008, p. 3) puts it, "policy is currently experienced as a constant flow of new requirements, changes, exhortations, responsibilities and expectations." This policy churn has left many schools and headteachers suffering profound reform enervation. But there is relentless pressure on English schools to continually improve. This is embodied in the expectation of OfSTED and Local Authorities that schools produce

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a School Improvement Plan based on a process of rigorous self-evaluation. Headteachers are expected to lead and manage the improvement process and are held accountable for the veracity of the school's judgement on all aspects of its provision, and for implementation of measures to ensure year on year improvement.

There is a literature describing, categorizing and critiquing this official school improvement and planning process (e.g., Hopkins, 2001; vs. Thrupp and Wilmott 2003) and, to a much lesser extent, the school self-evaluation process (Macbeath 2006; vs. Matthews and Sammons 2004). Researchers and headteachers' professional associations alike are in little doubt that the effects of the constant flow of mandatory policy and the associated planning and audit requirements means that the majority of heads must now work long hours and many resent the intense scrutiny to which they are subject (Bottery 2007; French and Daniels 2007; Thomson 2009).

Yet while all schools are expected to improve and to 'deliver' the ongoing twists and turns of policy, not all government strategies are mandatory. Some not only call for volunteers, but also require schools to compete for participation. Such elective policy initiatives are intended to be test-beds that generate examples of 'best practice': these can then be used to indicate the directions in which all schools are expected to head. This paper explores one such opt-in program, the English creativity initiative, Creative Partnerships. The case is instructive not only for the English context. The desire to promote innovation at the classroom level is shared by policymakers in many jurisdictions, and the prevailing English model of official school improvement with its accompanying practices of school development planning have parallels in other parts of the world.

Creative Partnerships (CP), funded primarily by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) via Arts Council England, with supplementary funds from the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS), targets schools in areas that are designated as deprived (see http://www.creative-partnerships.com). Funding supports creative practitioners, the majority of them artists, to work with teachers in redesigning curriculum, pedagogies, school cultures and structures (see Buckingham and Jones 2001; Hall and Thomson 2005, 2007; Jones and Thomson 2008). CPs ambition is to transform the practices of teaching and learning, and in so doing, change whole schools. It works in 36 English regions and, in the first 5 years of its life span, worked with over 2,400 schools, 50,000 teachers and 5,550,000 young people. CP estimates that more than one-third of the schools in England have had some contact with the program.

There is not a lot of research that explains *why* apparently harried heads actively seek the additional burden of a non-mandated initiative, and then *how* they incorporate it into their ongoing practices of school change.[1] This is our aim in this paper. We probe the reasons some headteachers offered for their pursuit of CP, and explore the ways in which they mobilized it within their school and to what ends. We follow this with a brief discussion about what our analysis might suggest about English headteachers' approaches to, and practices of, school change.

[1] There is of course some. One exception is the now defunct Networked Learning Communities program which produced a slew of professional documentation as well as research (e.g., Townsend et al. 2007).

Our research

We have been funded by Arts Council England to investigate how schools have taken up the offer made by and through CP to further whole school change.[2] The first phase of the project[3] consisted of a 'snapshot' of forty schools. A larger group of schools were initially nominated by CP (three per region), but we refined the sample to represent all phases of statutory education, including Pupil Referral Units, special schools, and nursery schools. The schools ranged in size, and were located in a variety of areas from rural to inner city. The data set includes:

1. schools that had recently experienced significant turbulence such as a critical OfSTED inspection, amalgamation and/or significant changes in staffing, often in the senior leadership team
2. schools that were 'plodding along.' These were not complacently 'coasting' schools (see Stoll and Fink 1996), but rather schools which *were* engaged in change, albeit without much urgency, energy or focused direction. Some of these schools were ready to speed up, while others were given a push through CP involvement
3. schools that were already engaged in explicit change. Some schools were more radical than others with one for example consisting of 'schools within a school.'

The 'sample' was not intended to be representative. Our interest was in seeing what might be learnt about the processes of school change from an apparently 'optimum group' of schools (see Connell 1995 on 'high theoretical yield'). Snapshot schools were visited by one researcher for 3 days; an initial four schools were visited by a pair of researchers in order to establish consistency of approach.

Our corpus of data consists of interviews (heads, teachers, school support staff, creative practitioners and creative agents, CP officers, parents and Governors), field observations, and documents. All schools were asked for formal recorded interviews with the head, and this happened in all but two cases where a deputy was interviewed (see Table 1) three to five informed staff and up to ten students, and to provide a selection of key school documents. These data were generated in all schools and the three sets of interviews together with field notes and texts provide the core of the data. All schools also chose to provide other material or to offer other conversations and these have been used to produce individual case descriptions (which were checked with schools before publication), rather than cross case analyses (see these and our interim report on http://www.creativeschoolchange.org.uk).

The case study data were coded and thematized (Silverman 1993, 1997) around six questions: (1) the issue(s) CP was intended to address, why this was an issue and for whom; (2) the theory of change talked about and used; (3) the intellectual resources the school drew on to inform change; (4) what happened, with whom, when and with what effects; (5) what was used as evidence of change; and (6) how

[2] The Creative School Change project is funded by Creative Partnerships, Arts Council England. It is a joint project of ….

[3] A second phase of the project has generated 'school portraits' (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997) of 12 schools drawn from this sample over two school years.

Table 1 Headteacher interviews (includes an acting secondary head and a female primary deputy where the male head refused to be interviewed)

School sector	Number	Male	Female
Nursery	3	1	2
Primary	21	3	18
Secondary	13	8	5
All ages	1		1
Special	2	2	
Total	40	14	26

While we have listed heads by gender in the table the numbers are too small and our data inadequate to generalize about gender effects

the school planned to make the change sustainable. We then generated a cross-case narrative of change across sites.[4] For this paper, we re-analysed data in each of the six areas specifically related to headteachers, leadership and change.

This analysis was then brought into conversation with the literatures on school change. Our theoretical orientation was informed by a Creative Partnerships commissioned literature review on school change (Thomson 2007b) and an interest in school change as an ongoing *practice* of school 'redesign' (Thomson and Blackmore 2006) which relies on building organisational change 'capacity' (Day 2007; Mitchell and Sackney 2000). We have a specific focus on building common understandings and know-how (Thomson and Blackmore forthcoming) because, as Elmore (2004, p. 73) succinctly puts it,

> …organisations that improve do so because they create and nurture agreement on what is worth achieving and they set in motion the internal processes by which people progressively learn how to do what they need to do in order to achieve what is worthwhile.

We were concerned in this study to see how much CP, with its emphasis on teacher professional and students' creative learning, might assist heads and their staffs to address the persistent 'institutional grammars' (Tyack and Tobin 1994) that constrain change. Could CP, we wondered, foster the kinds of organizational/professional learning that lead, however indirectly, to sustained difference over time to children's learning and wellbeing?

Changing schools with creative partnerships

Headteachers have to make decisions about whether or not to respond to a variety of 'calls' for participation. In this section, we describe how heads approached CP and

[4] While each 'field' researcher took responsibility for data generation and analysis in ten schools, five 'desk' researchers worked across the entire data set to produce the snapshot findings. ('Desk' researchers also visited one snapshot school to give them a sense of the methods used to produce the data.) In addition, a pair (a 'field' and a 'desk' researcher) has undertaken additional cross-case analysis around a theme: this is one of this set of themed papers.

what they saw as its possibilities, discuss ways in which they managed change, and offer some categorisations of their dispositions and the relationships with change modalities.

How heads saw the CP offer

The process of application for opt-in funded initiatives is time-consuming and bureaucratic, and heads have to be sure that the end result will be worth the effort. The heads in this study had a clear sense that the development of their school would be enhanced by involvement in CP. All of the heads exercised a degree of entrepreneurialism in seeking out the CP offer and were not so snowed under with mandatory requirements that they could not take up new initiatives as they came along, even if they were unanticipated. They also had a sufficient sense of their own way forward to make decisions about what was a 'good fit' and what wasn't. However they were often highly pragmatic about what constituted the 'fit.'

Initially, some two-thirds of the heads were attracted simply by the prospect of additional funding for extra-curricular and 'add on' project activities, before realising the potential of Creative Partnerships to support school development. However, the remainder were already committed to the promotion of the arts in their schools and saw CP as an opportunity to extend this further.

> … my main love is the creative arts; to me it opens doors; it creates memory and it's very powerful for all children, and it brings things out in those children who you feel are not keeping up academically. … And also, when things get tough, as they do for our children around here, having a link to the creative arts is sometimes good for the soul (primary head, female).

These heads equated creativity with the arts and discovered, through participation in the program, that CP intended more than this. Creativity was not confined to the arts, nor did it simply equate to new ways of teaching. Rather, it was a way of re-conceptualising children's learning across all subject areas, in and out of the classroom, and within and against the mandated curriculum (Craft et al. 2001).

In six snapshot schools, CP began and has remained as a series of isolated projects. While these projects benefited the students involved and perhaps their teachers, there has been little other spin-off in these schools. Many headteachers however, recognized after a time that CP would provide a level of specialist expertise that wasn't often available to schools and it was at this point that CP became part of their resources for change. A minority of heads and schools began with this view.

Change in the snapshot schools

All the heads and the vast majority of interviewed staff believed that the policy wheel was turning. They felt that the days when the prescribed curriculum stifled creative learning-teaching practice and alienated particular groups of children were

coming to an end. Heads were critical of the ways in which the national curriculum failed some students.

> Not all of our youngsters walk through the door every morning well disposed to the notion of learning. They are not passive, empty vessels who file into a classroom ready to be filled with knowledge and skills, and so we have to be very creative sometimes in order to engage them (primary head, female).

They wanted to find ways to enliven the curriculum, while fulfilling statutory obligations.

> I see myself as working towards changing the curriculum to make it exciting, to make it interesting, to take away a lot of the dullness that exists (secondary head, male).

Some had clear ideas of what they wanted in place of the national curriculum and why.

> … one of the big reasons we wanted to go for Creative Partnerships was about moving to a skills-based curriculum, and we wanted to develop the students' ability to be creative and inventive. We want them to be flexible workers and team players; all of those soft skills that the government has now decided are important again. … one of the disadvantages of the way that the curriculum is structured is that it doesn't allow for that kind of thing because of assessment and testing. And the biggest barrier to learning is the assessment regime that we operate under (secondary head, female).

In general, heads in the snapshot schools saw that some kind of cross curriculum, thematically based work was desirable (three secondary heads did not raise this as an issue). In some instances this was across some subject areas, and in other cases, it was across some year levels.

Heads and their staffs generally reported:

- a rejection of many of the elements of the technicist and rational mode of curriculum in which the teacher is 'deliverer,' the students are passive learners divided on the basis of ability/performance and there are absolute, permanently boundaried subjects, and
- the adoption of elements of a 'practical' approach to curriculum where the strongest students are encouraged to go beyond the basics, but where there is a strong emphasis on vocational and life 'skills' and 'self esteem,' and/or
- the adoption of elements of a 'progressive' approach in which the teacher is a facilitator and students are unique individuals who are encouraged to learn through problem solving, collaborative work and extensions of their own experiences and interests (adapted from Cooper and White 2004, p. 21).

Heads saw these as directions that were officially sanctioned by CP. In their interviews they suggested that CP would allow them to break out of the boundaries established by a prescriptive national curriculum. An initial meeting between staff of a primary school and CP representatives engendered '*a realisation that they could take ownership of the curriculum and develop it better to engage their children*'

(female primary). Another head believed that '*this gave us a poetic license to develop the curriculum more creatively*' (male secondary). One primary head told us

> But once they (CP) started talking about the philosophy behind it I thought that finally someone is saying what I've wanted to hear all these years. It was about children taking ownership and teachers being able to use their imaginations and do what they feel is right (primary head, female).

But engaging with CP did not negate the anxieties associated with the press for accountability and standards, specifically test and exam results. One head (primary) said that '*Everybody said that our results would go down if we started doing something creative …*'. She matched test results to periods of CP activity to show that they rose correspondingly so that, '*they will say that the creative approach is the right one.*' Another head of a primary school was firmly focused on justifying creativity:

> …we would like to be able to say with confidence that creativity is instrumental in raising achievement because that is the only argument that the government is going to listen to. … They only want to know that being creative in Year 1 will mean that they are going to get Level 4 or 5 in Year 6. … somehow we have to say that progress and attainment is affected positively by a child's engagement in creative activities and thinking creatively (primary head, female).

One secondary school head, under pressure to improve results, used CP projects to enhance the quality of coursework: he hoped this would have an impact on outcomes:

> I know there is a lot of good stuff going on here but the one thing that is still not right is exam results. They were still poor and I knew if we didn't do something about that quickly then we would be in danger.., So what I said to the CP co-ordinator at that time was that I didn't wish to interfere but you need to understand that just giving kids nice experiences is not enough. However you evolve these projects you will have to demonstrate to me that they will have an impact on outcomes; it's got to add something in terms of our abilities to raise attainment (secondary head, male).

Although involvement with CP was seen as an opportunity to break away from curriculum constraints, promote the arts, accelerate change and enhance reputation, the tensions between 'the standards agenda' and aspirations for more flexible and creative approaches to teaching and learning were often acute. While the ambition for more enjoyable schooling is not at odds rhetorically with 'standards,' all snapshot school heads were very aware that they and their school stood or fell on the policy reality of 'measurable' attainment and exam results. The temptation for heads in such situations is to play safe and stick with prescribed curriculum and lesson formats. This was the case for some heads in this study—but not all. Nor was it the case that the schools most under pressure were the most timid.

It takes a degree of courage for heads to experiment with more creative ways of working when the stakes are so high, and in our data set this was more associated

with experience/time in headship, than with the specific situation of the school. The coincidence of time-in-post with the preparedness to take risks (c.f., Day et al. 2008; Hargreaves and Fink 2006) is not surprising, since the more experienced the head the more likely they are to know what they can reasonably achieve, 'get away with' (Thomson 2008) and convince parents about. But experience alone does not equate to risk-taking, and there were eight relatively new heads who were pushing at boundaries and barriers, and some experienced heads who were not.

We now consider what heads did in their schools to move in these directions.

Headteachers and school change

While the literatures are somewhat divided about the effects that headteachers have on the learning of pupils (Day et al. 2007; Hatcher 2005), there is little doubt of their organisational importance. The major ways in which headteachers influence school change are through what is often called cultural/symbolic leadership (rituals, metaphors, narratives, symbols, representational and semiotic systems) linked to management of the interlocking sets of practices which establish routine connections between the educational activities of the school (in classrooms and other learning spaces) and the systems for making decisions, planning, evaluating, and managing resources (staff, time, money, space, networks and associations) (c.f., Spillane and Diamond 2007). Studies of change highlight the ways in which these systems and practices must be geared to the provision of 'spaces for dialogue and the extension of professional trust and autonomy' (Preistley and Sime 2005, p. 475). It is through the creation of such dialogic space that headteachers help staff manage the tensions between performative audit regimes and new approaches (Jeffrey and Woods 2009; Johnson 2004), as well as change collective organisational cultures (Gordon and Patterson 2008) and individual professional identities (Geijsel and Meijers 2005).

Our snapshot data does provide us an insight into some of these components. We focus here on 'situated-ness,' the stance towards change, and headteachers as masters and commanders of change.

Situated-ness

In the snapshot schools, school change was dependent on a number of externally generated factors which shaped what could be and was done (c.f., Good 2008). These included:

- what staff were in the school, what they knew and could do

Staff turnover was a significant barrier to developing sustainable change. Leadership time had to be spent recruiting and inducting new staff rather than on development. Leadership turnover could result in loss of momentum, loss of direction or a sudden about-face. CP could be part of the solution to these problems, but could not in itself entirely obliterate circumstances such as the reluctance of

many teachers to work in neighbourhoods adversely affected by poverty. Heads in schools with staffing problems necessarily saw attention to these basics as more important than CP.

- the history of the school and its position in the local educational market

Schools which suffered from a poor local reputation were often outwardly rather than inwardly focussed, particularly if they also had falling rolls. They were able to use CP to re-present themselves in the public eye. One way to accomplish this was via big 'splashy' projects. The continued need to maintain these one-off public events militated against slower and deeper changes. In these situations, heads tended to strongly steer what CP did to these image-management ends.

- the position in relation to systemically ascribed 'success'

Snapshot schools were variously framed by external pressures/events, such as OfSTED categories, past and proposed amalgamations and their relations with local authority. If schools had amalgamated then they often had to work hard to try to become 'one institution': CP could be helpful here. However in situations where both OfSTED and the Local Authority required the school to focus solidly on test results and targets, heads in particular found themselves torn between what they wanted to do with CP and what they had to do.

- what CP had to offer

Schools could only take up what the local CP decided it would do. This varied significantly around the country. Some schools in some locations were only offered engagement in one-off projects and/or in arts events, while others were offered large sums to employ local creative practitioners and agents for long periods of time. Some had access to 'creative agents' who acted as brokers ensuring that CP activities meshed with the school's change plans, while others took responsibility for their own planning. CPs capacity to influence the school and the school's capacities to mobilize CP were also thus delimited by what it made available.[5]

Leadership stance towards change

The 40 snapshot school headteachers had a wide range of experience, from three who had been in post for a year, to one who had 18 years of headship experience and was approaching retirement. The majority of heads (n = 26) who were interviewed, including the long-standing heads, had experience of headship in only one school. For a minority (n = 13) this was their second headship and for one it was their third. Four of the experienced heads were designated Executive Headteachers/Directors of a federation of schools.

[5] In its current iteration, CP has become much more standardized across the country, with all schools of creativity having a creative agent and a critical friend. Our research findings have in part contributed to this change.

The heads reported (and we were able to partially confirm) diverse approaches to leading and managing change. Some were unashamedly top–down.

> There is still very much a leadership saying how we are going to go forward (primary head, male).
> Change starts with the senior management team. It goes from top down. That's the way it has to be (secondary head, female).
> (Change) is probably heavily led, in the first instance, by the leadership group who tend to be the ones who have most of the time to think about the strategic vision of the school (primary head, female).

Sometimes, but not always, this top–down model for change was regarded as a temporary arrangement that would evolve into a more consultative style of management through which staff would have greater voice.

We did find evidence of recent or planned restructuring of leadership/management roles to promote opportunities for staff to lead innovations, and opportunities for whole staff, pupil and parent contribution to the change process. The opening up of discussion about change has, to an extent, been pushed by the expectations of OfSTED that schools seek the views of 'stakeholders.' But across the snapshot schools there was a realisation that successfully embedded change happens when the majority of staff is involved in the process and feel that they have 'ownership.'

> I found out very early that the only way you can have school change is that you have to work with and through the staff, and they have to have ownership (primary head, female).

Just under half of the heads tapped into the enthusiasm of small groups of teachers who they knew would be open to change and would be willing to try out new ideas. They were to trial and refine different practices which would then influence more cautious/resistant colleagues.

> Initiating change starts small with a few willing teachers, then others see what's happening and want to join in (nursery head, male).

We have developed some broad categorisations to describe groups of snapshot school heads; these highlight the ways in which heads engaged staff in the change process. We think that this rough heuristic helps to explain the kinds of change choices that heads made and the resulting routines which were set up to manage CP within the school. We suggest that these are categories which give a hint of the 'dispositions'[6] of the heads, as well as of the kinds of strategies they employed in order to maintain or improve their own and their school's standing in the field.

It is important to note that these positions:

- are not fixed, and we were told, and were able to observe in our case study schools, movement from one to another
- are strongly related to the situatedness of the school. We suspect that there is some degree of harmonisation between the ways in which the heads were

[6] While we have not yet engaged in a fully fledged analysis of the 'leadership habitus' of the headteachers (c.f., Lingard et al. 2003), these categorisations may be a step along the way.

initially selected, how they approached change and the particular context and position of the school.

We have characterized headteacher change dispositions as belonging to three groups:

(1) **the 'fixer'**

These were heads who were appointed to schools in crisis. They arrived with a set of strategies that they knew to be those that are seen to be necessary and that might well produce the kinds of rapid acceleration of measurable 'results' that are deemed important. 'Fixer' heads needed ways to quickly change school culture and generate good publicity. Fixer heads were very hierarchical and controlling on those things that were part of their short-term solution, and relatively 'hands off' on those things they saw as part of longer-term 'capacity building.' Some 'fixer' heads went further and also initiated and supported initiatives geared to longer-term change. But in our sample, one secondary head left his school because it was 'fixed' and he believed his repertoire of leadership strategies was inappropriate for the school's next stage of development. He was a self-styled serial 'fixer.' Other fixers were clearly oriented to a shift to a position in the next grouping.

(2) **the strong leader**

This grouping of heads were firmly in charge of their schools and saw themselves as the top of an organisational pyramid. They included:

- **the driver of change**

Often newly appointed to schools that were quietly 'plodding along,' these were heads who saw their job as bringing energy and urgency to the change process. Their major activities were focused on generating enthusiasm, naming and framing the focus, scope and scale of change, then selecting teacher leaders who would take on the designated activities and make them their own. This stance has a limited life and must move further or it equates to a version of 'fixing'

> It was a lovely school but it needed that bit of a challenge. We needed someone to put a rocket up its bum really…I suppose I see myself very much as captain of the ship keeping us all on course, but without the sailors on the boat it just wouldn't work and they (staff) have really taken my ideas and flown with them (primary head, female).

- **the 'hands on' head**

These were heads who took an active part in change and saw their practice as generating, initiating, legitimating, facilitating, managing, communicating, and coordinating. There was a role for others in having ideas for change but they saw that their job was at the centre of the change process.

> I think it's my job as headteacher to try to find ways to dovetail all initiatives and to see the initiatives that we're involved in all compliment each other in some way, but I have to be very creative in the way that I manage all of those

> initiatives. … I think I'm quite a big catalyst for change but I don't always know what needs changing and I don't always have the best ideas. But I do have access to all the ideas and all the possibilities. … I'll enable things to happen but I hope that other people will inform me on what really should be happening and that, you know, they will be the catalyst for the actual change and that I will be more in a kind of managerial role (secondary head, male).

- **the enabler of change, including that initiated by others**

These were heads who not only provided impetus for change but also appreciated and fostered the capacities of others to generate ideas and initiatives. There was an emphasis on sharing out leadership and management roles and responsibilities in ways that go beyond a simple delegation: this relied on trust and good communication. One SMT member described the head as having

> …attacked the school with real energy. He knew what needed to happen and he probably realized that some of the younger more dynamic staff who had more current thinking, more current ideas—the head sort of pulled them together to see what strengths they had and drive the school on … he has the final word on everything but managing the specialism is my role … he needs to be kept informed of things and who we want to get involved with things. He tends to turn up to stuff, but management of the whole thing is my role (deputy head, female).

(3) **the broker of partnerships**

A minority of heads (eight in total), all but one in the primary sector, saw their role as being the leader of a collaborative team. Unlike the other two groups of heads, their interviews with us were characterized by reference to forms of democratic practice and shared decision-making. Often in small schools, where regular staff discussions could be held and where communication was relatively unproblematic, they were visible and accessible, emphasized the importance of social relationships among staff, as well as with and among students, valued discussion, and often spoke of 'communities' and of shared learning. Trust among the staff was high, as was morale.

> I don't run the school. We run the school. It's very much a team effort and I delegate widely (primary head, female).

Nevertheless, and understandably in the current policy context, these heads remained the final accountability point.

We now take these three categories into a more extended discussion of the mechanics of change.

Headteachers: masters and commanders?

While all headteachers generally agreed that the success of initiatives such as CP depended on the support of the headteacher, and that there were powerful reasons

for supporting it, this did not mean that all of them saw this as equating to direct involvement in its operations. Their personal interest, their stance to change, as well as the size of the school, competing priorities and situated-ness, all played a part in the various ways in which CP was introduced and then managed.

Very often CP was delegated to a designated co-ordinator within the school, usually one of the senior management team, and/or a creative agent external to the school staff. One 'driver of change' told us

> I was previously deputy and my role was to deal with Creative Partnerships so all that was driven by me really right from conception. When I became headteacher obviously I had to relinquish that to some extent although I still play a fundamental part. … an assistant headteacher has taken over the Creative Partnership role and he drives it very much from the top. … we found that if it isn't driven by school leadership then, very often, it can be lost in the ether (secondary head, female).

By contrast a 'fixer' head whose eyes were firmly on the way to improve test results, and for whom CP was a way to improve school culture, morale and public image explained,

> The work that we do with (Creative Agent) is very important and he is part of the fabric of this school … I think he is key to that. He is the one who makes all of these connections. You need someone strong in school and then the school to support it, and then you need all your partners, but you also need that person in the middle who can liase and do all those bits (secondary head, male).

Another 'fixer' head with no access to a creative agent told us

> I could have said that the CP co-ordinator was just a classroom teacher with no access to senior management, but that was not the way I wanted to go. This initiative had to be driven by senior management (secondary head, female).

Ten heads had decided to build the costs of employing additional creative practitioners into their regular school budgets, and twelve had developed middle management positions with a cross-school creativity focus. While these appeared to be embedding CP within the school, this was not always the case since simply the presence of these lone operatives could not guarantee the spread of practice across the whole school.

Professional development and induction were strongly connected to the change approach taken by the senior management and the head. In some cases this meant a firm commitment to eliminating resistance or 'slackers.' One 'driver of change' said

> Nothing here has been a one off in terms of CP and we have used them, almost mercilessly, to get across our agenda to staff which is: this is how we do things in this school. We do work knowing how children like to learn best; we do work trying not to narrow the curriculum but deepening the understanding; we do work to find creative ways to do everything; we do work by connecting learning. And these projects have helped us to reinforce that message across

> staff and those who don't like it have to go because that's what we do here (primary head, male).

This stands in contrast to the more nurturing, developmental approach taken by an 'enabler of change.'

> We very carefully place any new staff coming in so that they are with an established team so they are sucked straight into the established team and the way that team works. And we choose our staff very carefully and we look for innovative people who can fit into our environment. We have our own induction (nursery head, female).

The commonality between the two is the strong sense of a central source of authority and power.

Opportunities for staff to contribute ideas and views in the change process were less problematic for smaller schools, usually primary, than for larger secondary schools. In smaller schools whole staffs could regularly meet together, formally and informally, for discussion and debate. However in our sample this only happened in small schools where there were 'partnership brokers' and 'enablers of change.' Nearly half of the secondary schools with 'strong leader' heads did manage annual events where staffs, and often pupils, were able to contribute to debate about change directions.

Larger schools had to establish formal mechanisms through which staff could influence change. One large primary school with an 'enabler' head established a 'Think Tank' comprised of staff volunteers, who were interested in promoting change, which met regularly for discussion and had decision making powers. 'Think Tanks' were formed/reformed for different purposes. A special school with a 'broker of partnerships' head set up a school change team with representatives from across the school.

> .. you have to have a vehicle through which to deliver it (change) in school so the idea of the school change team is to have representatives from every group of workers in school and for them together as a group to make decisions… well not to make decisions actually. To make representations about how they think the school can work more effectively. And then that is taken on board by the senior management team who look at how that can be practically developed in school….So from just having teachers and teaching assistants we've now gone on to include personal care assistants; we've got an IT technician; we've got a reprographics person… (special school head, male).

Two-thirds of the secondary schools developed new line-management arrangements to ensure greater sharing of ideas and views between different sectors. Learning teams, each with a director, had been created in about a quarter of the secondaries in a break away from the more traditional subject delineations. One newly created secondary school with a 'driver of change' head who then shifted to become a 'broker of partnerships,' was structured around 'a school within a school' idea to promote 'human scale education.' A consultative style of management allowed senior leaders to have more direct contact with staff to '*share ideals and*

practices.’ Another secondary school was reorganized into four academies with vertically grouped tutor groups, again to give a more human dimension to a large organization.

The choreography of change

Because the raison d’etre of CP activity is the co-production of new pedagogies, curriculum and assessment practices, the only way it can move beyond ‘the stand-alone project’ is if these new approaches become embedded in whole school practices. And because CP is an external ‘initiative’ it must either rely on existing change management approaches within schools, or establish new ones, in order to produce ‘whole school’ change. CPs impact is only as much as the school can, as well as will, embrace and embed.

It is therefore important to understand the dominant models of change that exist in the schools that CP is trying to permeate and stimulate.

Modalities of change

English headteachers have considerable power and responsibility. But they work within a highly directive policy framework with audit functions that carry hefty consequences for ‘poor performance.’ While ostensibly a devolved system, in reality, the vast majority of headteachers’ autonomy is confined to decisions about ‘delivery’ and ‘implementation.’ Even ‘vision’ statements, ostensibly about individual and unique school directions, are strongly framed by government policies. And ‘delivery’ and ‘implementation,’ said to be the purview of schools, are subject to strongly recommended practices for planning and leadership/management which are regularly surveilled (Boyle and Woods 1996; Draper and McMichael 1996; Hatcher 2005; Whitty 1997).

It is hardly surprising then that most often English schools are classic ‘command and control’ organizations (Drucker 1988), where change is driven from the top. While there may be delegations ‘distributed’ through the organization, ordinary staff members generally have, at best, limited chances to initiate change or to make decisions about major issues.

It was of interest to us that only eight of the 40 schools articulated an explicit theory of governance and/or had a decision-making policy with clearly delineated autonomies and responsibilities. The default position was the everything was communicated to and went through senior management and/or governing body, with some delegation of authority to middle managers. Some schools operated standing committees which reported to senior management and occasionally to staff meeting, but only rarely was CP placed in one of these structures. Student councils reported to and via senior management. Staff meetings were generally not decision-making bodies, except in the eight schools where, as already noted, staff routinely discussed most school issues. In these schools, staff meeting agendas had designated times and times for information giving and information sharing but there were also frequent

and regular times allocated for debating educational issues, including change projects. This was not the case in the majority of schools where debate was limited, and professional development was seen as ‘twilight training.’ Opportunities for staff to generate professional knowledge were tightly framed by mandated policy initiatives.

The routines of planning and evaluation were also most often those officially prescribed. At particular times of the year there were routine reviews and decisions made about curriculum, staffing and development priorities. One-off consultations with parents and students were geared to that year’s problems, mandates and priorities, much of which was determined from outside or by school senior managers. In some instances, CP was used as the means for a more general and open-ended review of the school and/or to renew or redesign school vision and mission.

Our snapshot data suggests that CP permeated this dominant model of schooling via one of four change modalities. It was:

1. part of the control and command architecture of the school. Senior managers decided the vision for the school using CP, and then included it in their mandated school improvement and evaluation documents. In some instances it was written into performance management agreements, or
2. a new ‘side by side’ approach that sat outside the control and command architecture. Senior managers allowed a more democratic and open forum for discussion and decision making about a particular topic or topics. There was some opportunity for staff to take control of agendas. The ways in which this fed back into the control and command architecture were via senior management, or
3. the stimulus for changing from a command and control architecture to something where teachers could influence change through a ‘top down-bottom up’ approach. Senior managers reviewed their governance and management structures as part of the process of mobilising the CP offer and consciously addressed the ways in which knowledge generated through CP would inform curriculum review and be the basis for professional development, or
4. was taken up in schools where the senior leadership team are already working to change the command and control approach, or in the minority that already worked differently. Senior managers had a set of processes which allowed staff at any level or section of the school to initiate change, there was a process through which this could be evaluated and communicated, and there were decision-making fora which allowed for informed debate about spreading changes through the organization.

Heads who were ‘fixers’ were likely to be stuck in the first two command and control structures, but ‘strong leaders’ might make the transition over time to another modality, and ‘brokers of partnerships’ were already in the business of moving from 3 to 4, deconstructing the dominant policy conception of school change.

Our snapshot data suggest strongly that the first three modalities were the most common. In the first case, where CP became part of top–down change, it often encountered an ‘implementation problem’ where senior leaders struggled to persuade

the majority of the staff to take up changes developed in small ‘lighthouses’ (7 schools). The second case, where CP ran alongside the usual school structures, was more successful as very often CP activities were part of one-off reviews of the school or a one-off development of an aspect of the school. Changes to year level curriculum for example, which did have lasting effects, were often developed in snapshot schools in this way (18 schools). Our data also has some instances where CP became part of a shift in leadership/management practice, as in the third modality, particularly in relation to the role of students in decision-making. Some schools did integrate CP into their regular planning and review cycles.

> I would say that until this year some of our staff were aware of CP involvement in the school and other staff had no idea whatsoever. So one of the things we have done is to move away from projects and focus on the personal development of the staff and through that CP becomes an integral part of our school improvement planning; our inset structure; our every day delivery and it is almost setting a cycle of work going (primary head, female).

The fourth case, where the command and control structure was under deconstruction, was rare. As noted, we found eight schools where the staff meeting continued to be an important site for debate and discussion, and for collective decision–making. In such schools, teachers still had an opportunity to influence and be part of overall school governance. In such cases, whole staffs discussed becoming involved with CP, and regularly considered its implications.

> We put big flip chart sheets up with questions. ‘Would Creative Partnerships be good for us as a school at this time?’ was one of the questions. ‘What level of involvement is appropriate for this school now?’ ‘How could Creative Partnerships contribute to long term and ongoing change within school?’ ‘What sort of impact could the Creative Partnerships program have on pupils and on staff?’ ‘What is the most significant issue in school right now and how might CP address this?’ ‘How would Creative Partnerships become part of our School Improvement plan?’ and ‘How could we measure success? And people went with post-its and scribbly pens. In the end the Deputy and I had all these sheets with people’s thoughts and ideas. So this wasn’t one person doing it. It wasn’t even just two of us. We felt that if it was going to work, the only way we do work in this school is do things together. That sometimes means you drive it with a group of you or a couple of you, but it still has to be shared. It will not work unless everybody’s on board (primary head, female).

This however was the minority in the 40 schools, rather than the rule.

Some tentative conclusions

CP is a comparatively small program, whose funds at school level are tiny in relation to the overall size of school budgets. It has been in operation for what in school reform terms is a relatively short period of time (Hargreaves and Goodson 2006; Thomson 2007a), although it already has a longer shelf life than many other

initiatives. In these circumstances, we think that CP has 'punched above its weight' in terms of its effects in schools.

Our findings suggest that if the English education system is take advantage of the energies, knowledge and commitment of teachers in order to produce creative learning opportunities for children—as it says through CP and other 'opt-in' programs that it now does—then it needs to do more than stop designating them simply as implementers and deliverers. They must be seen as, and supported to become, active agents of change. Such a shift requires new forms of headteacher leadership/management and new forms of planning for, and managing change.

This kind of change also means bringing the officially designated models of planning, leading and managing change into question. The command and control structures of English schooling, which require relatively hierarchical heads and practices of planning and development, is the preferred government model, as well as the ongoing 'grammar' of schooling (Tyack and Tobin 1994) which has proved notoriously hard to shift (Jones 2003; Tyack and Cuban 1995). However, current official leadership discourse enthuses about the benefits of 'distributed leadership.'[7] This term has various interpretations, and in the snapshot schools it was energetically endorsed. In practice it generally consisted of the delegation of data-driven, performance management and classroom observation modes of school improvement to middle managers and advanced skills teachers, combined with the distribution beyond the senior management team of responsibility for managing CP, or aspects of CP. In some cases this *did* mean that staff outside of the senior management team were able to initiate projects and take responsibility for programs which affected parts of the school. But more often than not, this was in extra-curricular areas, or in vocational and applied subjects such as the arts.[8] Steerage of changes to mainstream curriculum were generally held firmly at the top. Furthermore, only a few of the schools had the kinds of structures for professional development, governance and review/planning that allowed staff and students to take a major role in building a new 'community of practice.'[9]

It thus seems clear that, at least in these 40 schools committed to change and reform of the dominant curriculum and pedagogies, much remains to be done. If the English education system is to use programs such as CP to disrupt the boundaries of the national curriculum, as it suggests that it does, then assisting teachers to become active producers of professional knowledge in order to change what happens in classrooms, is critical. Accomplishing this requires new and legitimate new forms of headteacher leadership/management. There is a role for CP in achieving this, but it is also something a government attempting to shift at least some schools away from a simple command and control model might endorse and support. Some schools in CP *are* moving in different ways to allow teachers, other school staff and creative

[7] There is not space here to debate the adequacy of the notion of 'distributed leadership' (Harris 2008; Spillane 2006): our own position is closer to its critics (Fitzgerald and Gunter 2008; Hatcher 2005).

[8] These delimitations raise the question of distribution of what, to whom and to what ends, a matter we will pursue in the subsequent longitudinal case studies.

[9] Like distributed leadership, 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998, 2000) is a notion subject to critiques (Barton and Tusting 2006) with which we are sympathetic and which there is no space to explicate.

practitioners to generate new approaches to schooling, and to attempt to infuse creative pedagogies across their organisation.

But our analysis of snapshot schools' headteachers and their approaches to change suggests that much still remains to be done in relation to developing, articulating and debating different models of change management. There is an opportunity here and now to support these schools in a more systematic way, by using them as the crucible for further change discussion and debate. If this were to happen, then Creative Partnerships would have much to offer to all those interested in school change, since it would become less a story of butting up against barriers and boundaries, and more a story of how these were disrupted.

However, this case does more than provide information about one program in England. It also provides some leads for research into school change. In particular, the notion of headteacher change stances and how these relate to change modalities may offer a generative line of inquiry. Our snapshot data is too thin to do more than propose these as possibilities. While we have able to pursue these in more detail in the follow-up twelve case studies we know it will take a specifically focused study to examine the ways in which headteacher's change orientations and dispositions are formed through life trajectories, shaped in specific socio-cultural, policy and local contexts, and play out in school governance and change modalities.

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