

## Presentations by Dr. Phil Norrey and James Hennessy

### ' Creativity - Revitalising the Education Agenda '

The two speakers gave a combined presentation interlinking their views and comments. The notes below represent a digest of their observations in order of presentation.

#### Dr. Phil Norrey ( Director for Education, Arts & Libraries )

Phil began by setting the context of the presentation within the year-long countywide debate about Devon's 'Vision for Learning'. He referred to the various strands of discussion including active engagement in learning, promoting social relationships, health-related issues and the development of proud but tolerant individualism. Within the discussions on creativity he identified 4 initial questions and offered some possible answers:

- **Why Creativity?** Creativity requires effort but is stimulating and challenging. Our economy is powered by creative activity with a direct connection between creativity and economic wealth. In today's world it is often the case that creativity both drives and is driven by Information Technology. We need both creative thinking and the personal fulfilment it brings.
- **What is creativity?** It is, he suggested, the capacity for originality, for providing an alternative to the expected, for expanding the range of possibilities open to us all, but particularly to young people
- **What are the aspects of a creative education?** It is difficult to identify and pin down creativity – it is certainly not something that can be easily ticked off in boxes. That does not mean it represents a lack of discipline : for example, a properly constructed dramatic performance requires much shared discipline and control. Nor is creativity the province of elitism or just the fine arts. In our very diverse world there is a clear link between creativity and cultural activity.
- **What baseline for creativity are we starting from in Devon?** There are nationwide worries that creativity has been squeezed out of the curriculum by overemphasis on literacy and numeracy. Devon has been committed to creativity throughout
  - It kept creative work within the EDP ( and against strong advice from the DfES )
  - It has promoted a lot of drama and arts work
  - It has maintained creative specialisms within the advisory service
  - It has witnessed the development of DAISI
  - It believes that time spent on creative activity promotes achievement in core subject areas

In all of this the LEA has also seen a governor commitment to keeping creativity alive and thriving in Devon

#### James Hennessy ( Chair of Devon Arts In Schools' Initiative )

James explained how DAISI had been created on the initiative of Devon school governors some 8 years ago as a direct response to the perceived threat to the creative curriculum. During that time DAISI has helped revitalise educational practice and creativity in schools. He outlined the practical steps undertaken through the lottery funded Groundswell Project to create a viable and sustainable support framework for furthering the creative curriculum within schools. The number of schools, pupils and artists involved had increased over the 8 years with the help of a strong central team led by Zannah Doan ( Chisholm ). He quoted from the positive evaluations of many of the activities, stressing how, often, collective experiences had helped develop individual performances. As a drama specialist he perceived the clear value from the social activity involved but asked whether it was possible to 'measure' the benefit in the way that often seems to be required.

**PN** continued by looking to the future. Research had shown that Drama is the most motivational of all secondary subjects. Compared with many other countries creativity is already a strength within the British system. He argued that we need teachers who can foster creative experience. There is no research that provides incontrovertible evidence of what is required for the good delivery of creativity but he suggested they were teachers who:

- were effective communicators and self - managers
- had a clear knowledge of the process
- demonstrated a purposeful approach
- were curious and open to risk-taking
- were able to accept setbacks
- wanted to improve themselves and develop their own problem-solving skills

Governors should ask themselves whether their school had such teachers amongst their staff.

He felt that creativity would be stifled by

- aversion to taking risks
- a preoccupation with end results
- constant anxiety and a desire to seek regular approval
- tiredness and stress – creativity needs time and space to breathe.

He did not consider Arts subjects as the sole area for fostering creativity – Science, amongst other subjects, had a major role to play in promoting creative thinking.

In his role as Director he believed that he should be ‘ putting creativity up in lights and keeping it there ‘, provided, that is, that the Devon community indicated that it wanted this to happen. To do this he felt we would need to:

- create a culture of teachers as learners
- build in recognition of the value of creative work as part of the normal process of education
- use opportunities within the Extended Schools’ scheme ( the recent budget gave a hint of extra funding here ) to promote creativity beyond the classroom
- use opportunities from Workforce Remodelling to support creative work ( he referred to a Plymouth pilot scheme being used to do this )
- take advantage of the Academic Council framework to encourage schools to work together in developing activities
- put the emphasis in the new primary strategy on **enjoyment** in order to develop a Devon primary strategy
- exploit the vision of the proposed Tomlinson reforms for imaginative KS4 and 14 – 19 work
- embrace the current government buzzword phrase ‘ Personalised Learning ‘ to provide opportunities
- copy the Tim Brighouse concept for London schools of developing a strong entitlement curriculum for secondary pupils that would encourage creativity.

Referring to visits he had made to many schools that had undertaken DAISI supported work, **JH** said that in many there was much to celebrate and provoke joy and admiration. However, the role of creative work could and should also be to offer challenge and dissonance .... and such outcomes should not be discouraged. DAISI is currently looking to develop multicultural packages within the framework of the ‘ Strengthening School Communities ‘ project. This project is a logical step forward for DAISI and complements the concept of extended schools and promoting DAISI work within the communities of which individual schools are a part. Quoting from evaluations of recent work he emphasised the excitement of schools where parents, grandparents and community members became involved in work alongside pupils both within and outside normal school hours. He felt that DAISI needed to continue to nurture those teachers who are artists in their own right and above all to be given the time and money to meet its aims.

James concluded by playing fulsome tribute to Zannah Chisholm who has led DAISI so competently and enthusiastically since its inception and who would be standing down from her post in the summer. His comments met with warm applause from the delegates.

[ The full transcript of James' presentation is available on request to [ivan.godfrey@devonag.freeseerve.co.uk](mailto:ivan.godfrey@devonag.freeseerve.co.uk) ]

## Questions and Answers

During a lively discussion prompted by questions from delegates the following points emerged:

- It is very important that in a county such as Devon that lacks the cultural diversity of many areas of the country we encourage creative and multicultural diversity and thinking
- Research has shown that pupils who are offered more time and input on creative activities achieve better results in basic subjects than those who focus solely on the basics
- DCC is seeking to work in partnership to develop entitlement for teachers to conduct research. This possibility may attract, entice and motivate teachers. There is also an issue over the replacement of our teaching profession over the next few years. It is more difficult to attract teachers into their ‘second jobs’.
- Using IT links with schools across the country allows pupils in rural schools to begin to have an awareness of a range of different cultural and creative experiences
- It is very important to develop creative thinking in scientific work which will contribute to worthwhile research. Science has its own aesthetic, as has mathematics.
- Unhealthy lifestyles can be a barrier to creativity, but work in this area has been squeezed from the curriculum in the past. This must change - there is a link between healthy bodies and healthy minds.
- Delegates welcomed the emphasis given in the presentations on teachers as learners and researchers in their own right. Benefits were seen in developing links with local universities to promote this.
- A number of delegates gave instances of examples of excellence of DAISI work within their own schools

The Chair thanked both presenters most warmly for their contributions and responses to a challenging and positive session and delegates showed their appreciation by lengthy applause.