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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to research the expectations and experiences of digital media practitioners working in traditions of informal education in the context of partnership work with schools with the remit of collaboratively fostering creative use of digital media through production activity.

It concerns examining the discourses of creativity which surround the rationale for a singular pilot project *Blueboard* commissioned by *Creative Partnerships*, whose work forms part of a national government strategy to create opportunities for the cultural and creative development of young people in education.

It examines how this discursive formation, reflecting a range of educational and creative imperatives impinges on practitioners expectancy and experience of what constitutes creative practice. Furthermore, it specifically addresses the creative potential of digital technologies in this process and examines the domain of what is commonly referred to as the *community media sector* in order to assess the criteria by which practitioners define their professional identities and what traditions and motivations inform their approach and practice.

The findings indicate that practitioners expectancy and experience of fostering creativity with the tools of digital media in this context reflect latent ambiguities which arise from the complex, contradictory and speculative nature of discourses of creativity which reflect wider social and political interests and concerns impacting on the

development of a creative imperative directing pedagogy and therefore the ability to support the learning process.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my academic supervisor Dr. Andrew Burn of the Institute of Education, University of London, and fellow practitioners involved in the Blueboard Digital Media Pilot Project, Creative Partnerships Bristol and immediate family and friends without whom the undertaking of this work would not have been possible.

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Preface

In the summer of 2004 I was asked to participate in a digital media pilot project, now known as *Blueboard*. The scheme, funded and supported by *Creative Partnerships Bristol* sought to pair four leading film, video and multi media organizations/companies based in Bristol & Bath, with a number of local schools providing them with a long term residency, aimed at developing creative use of digital media.

I have been working in the 'community media' sector in Bristol for about four years, primarily as a freelance associate for Knowle West Media Centre, one of the partner companies in the scheme. KWMC "uses photography, video and multimedia as a tool to address social, economic and environmental disadvantage in Knowle West".

(Knowle West Media Centre Information Pack 2004)

My experience is that of project based digital media work, facilitating the development of production skills, using film, video, and photography and with some experience of community radio production. These projects, in the main, constitute short-term or one-off pieces of work with small groups of, mostly, children and young people from a variety of backgrounds and/or community organizations in what could be termed as informal based settings such as youth centers, community centers and other localized venues.

Prior to the *Blueboard* project I haven't had the opportunity to engage in work as a digital media practitioner with schools or in other formal education settings. Indeed,

KWMC were still in the early stages of forging a variety of connections with schools within the nearby area.

However, I did gain a lot of insight into partnership working in schools as a coordinator for the Bristol Education Action Zone, a two year post which ended in March 2005. The role required me to work collaboratively with a Bristol infant and junior school with the aim of engaging parents, through a variety of means, as equal partners in their children's learning. Through this work I became aware of the potential benefits and challenges of partnership work with schools. I became interested in factors which enable and those which inhibit successful collaboration between partners. From personal observation the crux of effective partnership work appeared to centre on high levels of shared understanding about the terms of engagement, expectations and objectives to be pursued.

It was during this time that I sought to develop my critical insights and explore opportunities for professional development as a digital media practitioner working with community groups. There appeared to be no tailor made formal training that dealt with practices and theoretical approaches to working in this sector.

In 2003 I began a Masters degree in Media, Communication and Culture delivered by The School of Culture, Language and Communication at the Institute of Education, London. The degree programme offers the opportunity for educators and others with an interest in analysis and production of multimodal communication to explore relevant theoretical and practical concerns. I was attracted by the opportunity to

enhance my existing skills and develop new skills relating to my field of expertise rooted within an analytical and theoretical grounding.

There is a growing interest within the school in the use of digital media and information and communication technology in all phases of education and in informal settings, and in research methodology and exploration of new sites and modes of knowledge production. (Course Handbook 04-05:7)

I chose degree modules which I felt would compliment my professional work in digital media as a facilitator and educator, including *Introduction to Media Education, Children's Media Culture and Youth Culture*.

The impact of this engagement was that I was able to develop new critical insights about my field of work, based on an understanding and awareness of related theory and practice. Furthermore, it became clear that, in terms of the use of digital media as an educational, social or cultural tool within the informal sector, this was an under-researched area, lacking in documentation.

It is within this context that the genesis of this piece of research emerged. *Blueboard* appeared to offer a set of unique opportunities, firstly to engage in a *long term* digital media pilot project as a practitioner, working in schools alongside teaching and support staff and secondly, as a research opportunity investigating the interplay between production companies; with a history of working using digital media forms

predominantly in informal contexts; and schools, a formalized learning environment, all under the remit of fostering *creative* practice.

Furthermore, I have been commissioned by *Creative Partnerships Bristol* to produce a formal evaluation report of *Blueboard*, which is due for completion in November 2005.

Dr. Andrew Burn, Senior Lecturer in Media Education and Associate Director of the Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media, Institute of Education is providing academic guidance and support throughout the research process.

INTRODUCTION

SETTING THE SCENE

What is BLUEBOARD?

Blueboard is a pilot project developed to address a number of key issues facing Bristol schools and the local creative media sector.

- *Schools are investing financially in ICT kit but informal feedback from schools indicated that in order for the use of the kit to be sustainable and meaningful additional investment and support is required in terms of time, ideas and with raising confidence.*
- *Access to the creative media sector, in particular film and video, by young people is limited and provision, fragmentary. Largely speaking, schools are not able to capitalise on the sector as a resource and conversely opportunities for the sector to engage with schools and, indeed, with other media companies need to expand.*

Consequently, Creative Partnerships Bristol in conjunction with Bristol LEA commissioned four film and video companies/organisations to work with schools. The companies/organisations have a great deal of experience of engaging children and young people in digital media production, but not predominantly within a formal education setting.

Each company/organisation spent an entire academic year exploring new approaches to working with digital media and ICT. On average the companies were expected to spend one day a week working with the schools (although, in reality the time spent equated to three 'people' days a week in schools). The strand included one infant school, four primary schools and two secondary schools. Of those schools four had a substantive history of Creative Partnerships involvement.

The expectation is that these residencies and this framework will leave behind expertise, excitement and new ways of working (Outline Brief: May04)

Rationale and Aims

Defining the specific focus of this research has been difficult. The immensity of the Blueboard project has offered a plethora of possible lines of enquiry and it has extremely challenging to refine ideas and concerns into an analytical hub which constitutes a well defined set of objectives directing the research process.

The nub of the pilot project is to develop the creative use of digital media in schools enabled by building relationships between external professionals engaged in working with digital media and school staff and pupils. On the surface, the remit of the pilot project may appear to be patently clear; yet from my own observations and experience as a participant it raises a number of complex issues all of which stem from perceptions of the terms of engagement and expectancy of the partnership with regard to the function of creative practice.

Creative Partnerships, the 'broker' and funding body responsible for the pilot project emerged in response to recommendations in a 1999 government green paper that attended to promoting cultural and creative development of young people in the formal and non-formal education¹. The report placed the fostering of creativity at the epicenter of young people's educational development. It stressed creative thinking would draw out dormant and untapped ability and potential whilst enhancing existing skills and abilities.

The rationale of *Creative Partnerships* is to enable schools and the 'creative sector' to forge relationships and develop projects in partnership which will provide young people with opportunities for cultural and creative development.

The paper argued that not only will this process contribute to increased educational attainment but it will also contribute to the individual well being of young people in the education system and that this process is, in fact, essential for Britain's future economy and the social cohesion of British society, a society in which they recognise the creative talents of all young people as necessary to the formation of an enterprising and unified cultural landscape.

The remit of *creative* practice is a central tenet of Blueboard by virtue of the ethos and directive of *Creative Partnerships*. As a concept, *creativity* has proved to be extremely slippery and subject to ambiguities in terms of perception and understanding of its meaning within society at large, especially in terms of its historical alliance with 'artistic

¹ NACCCE – National Advisory Committee on Creativity and Cultural Education – 1999 report. "All Our Futures"

practice' and in its ambivalent relation to traditional notions of education. Thus, as a social concept, the term carries with it varied and often contradictory connotations and implied meanings which therefore need to be located within specific socio-historic, political and cultural contexts.

I intend, by examining relevant literature and theoretical discussion about the nature of creativity specifically in relation to education to be able to identify and explore the formation of particular discourses, that is, ways of understanding, enacting and experiencing *creativity* that underpin the rationale of this project.

A hypothesis is, therefore, that concentrating an analysis of how creativity is defined and informed by particular discourses will indicate that ambiguities arise in the shared understanding between stakeholders in a partnership context such as this pilot project as to the expectations and experience of what creative practice means, or looks like, 'on the ground', which field research focusing on practitioners experiences is intended to investigate, and that, if this is the case, to what affect from *a practitioners perspective?*²

This task is made more complex by the juncture of practitioners, with predominant experience of working with young people in non-formal or informal educational, (more over typically community based), settings and by the medium of digital technologies which they employ in their work. The dialectic relationship between

² The term 'practitioner' is used in this context to denote an individual who is professionally engaged in the daily practise of production using digital media forms, such as film, video, photography or multimedia, and who, for these purposes has been commissioned to work in partnership schools to deliver this service

these elements require unravelling because they contribute to the overall experience of how creativity is perceived and functions in their practice, (and as a result how it is experienced by other participants, such as children and teachers, although within the scope of this research I will not be attending specifically to this aspect).

All four companies/organisations involved in Blueboard share a similar commitment to creating opportunities for socially disadvantaged individuals/groups, routinely those with limited access to the means of digital media production to engage in project work, such as digital photography and digital video production. The generic umbrella term for these types of organisations/companies commonly referred to is 'the community media sector' and is equated with non-formal and informal learning contexts. The term denotes a particular ethos and approach which could be broadly described as democratic and socially inclusive.

As I have identified in the preface, there is a lack of critical enquiry and theoretical underpinning that seeks to explore the practices, approaches and outcomes involved in such work. 'Community Media' has become a catch all term but from my experience clearly does not adequately describe or reflect the nature and variety of provision on offer, nor does it indicate the distinctive motivations, origins and philosophies underlying the practice of engaging people in digital media production within these contexts.

I will examine key literature that aims to further our understanding of this type of provision and analyze how prevalent discourses and key philosophies which ground

the work may contribute to the development and expectation of creative practice vis-à-vis researching the experiences of practitioners involved in Blueboard.

Finally, equally as important in informing notions of creative practice in this context is the role played by digital technologies. Much hype surrounds the potential of digital mediums in advancing opportunities for creative work across the formal/informal spectrum and, therefore, in pursuing a range of social, political and indeed educational ideals. For this reason, any subsequent analysis must explore the function and affect of employing digital media technologies within this process. In this sense, I will be aiming to seek answers to the question what perceived difference does the use of digital media make and how does this influence expectation of creativity?

KEY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore wider discourses of creativity that inform and shape the work of *Creative Partnerships* examining the rationale of partnering the creative sector with schools to create opportunities for cultural and creative development.
- To examine notions of *informal/vis-à-vis* formal education and to explore the term 'community media' and the philosophies and origins that underpin the work of digital media practitioners with a history of community based project work.
- To consider the role of digital technologies in terms of the perceived difference digital media makes to the process of creative practice within formal and informal educational settings.

- To conduct field research with practitioners involved in Blueboard in order to investigate 1) how they construct and perceive their professional identities, with specific regard to notions of the 'community media' sector and looking at the implications of having an *educational* proviso 2) the individual school contexts in which they are working; in terms of the schools ethos and approach to creative practice and practicalities of using digital media in terms of access to resources such as appropriate equipment and training 3) how the practitioners perceive the expectancy of creative practice using digital media; in the process of teasing out the varied interests and concerns of the different stakeholders and to explore the affect of this expectancy in terms of their actual experiences of engagement with schools.
- To analyze the research data by relating it to relevant theory and critical discussion in order to evaluate how discourses of creativity work dialectically in conjunction not only with perceptions about the nature of the community media sector but also the role of digital technologies, to shape and influence the expectations and experience of creative practice using digital media.
- Through pursuing the aims set out above to assess the hypothesis that ambiguities arise in shared understanding between stakeholders in a partnership context such as this pilot project as to the expectations and experience of what creative practice means, or looks like, 'on the ground', because of the multifaceted discursive formation relating to creativity.
- To provide subsequent recommendations for further enquiry based on the findings of this research.

MOTIVATION, PURPOSE & APPLICATION

The impetus for this research stems from a desire to contribute to an emergent field of critical enquiry which seeks to provide a theoretical and practical underpinning to the work of, practitioners and educators, working with digital media forms; with a remit of creative practice, whose foundations are rooted in informal, commonly, community based contexts but who also may engage or be considering engaging in partnership work with formal education providers.

As such, this piece of research constitutes an action research project, a reflective process; in other words, the purpose of engaging with research is that it will provide a basis for reviewing approach and practice and in doing so may inform change and the professional development of practitioners.

I would envisage that anyone with an interest in the practice and educational and creative function of using digital media forms within either formal or informal learning environments or for those concerned with the development of partnerships between creative professionals and schools will find useful points of reference and recommendation within this body of research.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify that whereas, this research, in line with its aims, necessarily deals first and foremost with a practitioners perspective it is my intention that the scope of the forthcoming evaluation report, commissioned by *Creative Partnerships* will expand on this research to take first hand account of the

perspective of the school community vis-à-vis perceptions and expectations of creativity using digital media.

IMPLEMENTATION

Given the scope and scale of the pilot project and the limits of time and resources at my disposal I have chosen to focus on two particular partnerships between production companies/organizations and schools on which to base my research. Each creative partnership within the scheme is characterized by its own unique context and attributes. However, I sought to select two partnerships that appeared to offer contrasts in terms of 1) the schools historical links to *Creative Partnerships*, with differing degrees of engagement and 2) production companies, practitioners, with different, but not hugely dissimilar, profiles of engagement not only with *Creative Partnerships* but with digital media project work.

I will expand fully on the approach to this analysis in chapter 4 which deals specifically with methodology.

OUTLINE

Chapters 1-3 encompass a literary review. In these chapters I will examine existing literature that relates to the research topic, assess its relevance to the key research questions and illuminate subsequent implications.

Chapter 1

This chapter will explore prevailing discourses of creativity in relation to the rationale which underpins the development of creating partnerships between schools and professionals involved in the creative and cultural sector.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 will examine the context of local film and video companies with a history of community media production and project work, exploring the origins and philosophies which underpin their approach to working with digital media in informal learning environments.

Chapter 3

The function of this chapter is to look at the role of digital technologies, specifically digital media forms such as video and photography and explore what opportunities these offer for creative work with young people within the spectrum of educational settings.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 outlines the approach taken towards the research process, the framework and design. I will detail methods and techniques used to collect and present evidence and illuminate the selection process; considering factors which have shaped and informed my methodological approach to the research.

Chapter 5

This chapter will deal with the presentation and interpretation of resultant data and analyzes the implications for the key research aims and central hypothesis.

Chapter 6

The final chapter will provide a summary of the research conducted and will present conclusions and subsequent recommendations.

CHAPTER ONE

'Creative' Discourse

Creative Partnerships, a government funded initiative grew in response to the *All Our Futures* Green paper published in 1999 (NACCE report). The committee's report makes recommendations for provision; arguing for a national strategy for the creative and cultural development of young people in formal and non-formal education up to the age of 16; to find ways to unlock the creative potential of young people by developing opportunities for creative and cultural education.

By creative education we mean forms of education that develop young people's capacities for original ideas and action: by cultural education we mean forms of education that enable them to engage positively with the growing complexity and diversity of social values and ways of life. We argue that there are important relationships between creative and cultural education, and significant implications for methods of teaching and assessment, the balance of the school curriculum and for partnerships between schools and the wider world. (NACCCE: 6)

The central message delivered by *All Our Futures* was the need for *re-balancing* in the education system moving beyond existing dichotomies in relation to national priorities, structure and organisation, the curriculum, teaching methods and school's relationships with other agencies.

It argues that an exclusive emphasis on attainment vis-à-vis traditional academic criteria works to preclude the recognition of young people's abilities in other areas and therefore schools should promote and support the *creative* attainment of their pupils which should be just as rigorous a process and that recognising what young people

are good at improves their self esteem and confidence which raises overall performance.

Furthermore, in terms of future employment, business and industry world wide, particularly those dealing in 'new knowledge based economies' concerned with communication, entertainment, information and science and technology, increasingly require flexible workers with creative skills and abilities, who can adapt to develop and provide new products and services in the face of rapidly changing markets and in this respect it is argued "academic ability alone will no longer guarantee success or personal achievement". (NACCCE: 13)

All Our Futures asserts that we all possess creative abilities that can be developed to certain degrees given appropriate opportunities to 'discover' them. They identify the need for educators to provide the conditions for this development across all educational disciplines and subject areas; arts, sciences and humanities, recognizing and fostering young people's creative capacity by cultivating their knowledge and understanding of wider culture.

There are many misconceptions about creativity. Some people associate creative teaching with a lack of discipline in education. Others see creative ability as the preserve of a gifted few, rather than of the many; others associate it only with the arts. In our view, creativity is possible in all areas of human activity and all young people and adults have creative capacities. Developing these capacities involves a balance between teaching skills and understanding, and promoting the freedom to innovate, and take risks. (NACCCE: 11)

The NACCCE committee recommends that schools need to engage with a broad network of other partners and providers which including business, industry,

community groups and cultural organizations to achieve these aims. Equally, amid the rapid rise of creative industries in the United Kingdom it distinguishes the role artists and creative organizations based in education and the community, for example artist-in residence schemes, children's theatre and community-led projects based in the arts and cultural activities, play in such networks.

The creative industries are often quoted in support of the economic case of the arts. This broader field of community education and outreach work is evidence of its social significance. We attach great importance to these programmes and initiatives and see vital roles for them in achieving the objectives set out in this report. (NACCCE: 139/140)

Since its inception in May 2002 until July 2005 Creative Partnerships worked with 4,300 schools and 3,222 creative organizations (Source: www.creative-partnerships.com). The initiative funded by Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has been extended until 2008 and spans thirty six areas, led by Area Directors across nine regions of England.

Creative Partnerships aims to transform learning. We try to do this by building sustainable partnerships between children, schools, teachers, community and the creative sector. By placing creativity more centrally in children's lives we aim to enable them to think differently, feel differently and act differently and, the hope is, they then can have the tools to shape a better future, for themselves and society. (Matt Little, Creative Partnerships Bristol, Area Director in 'I had an idea', July 2005)

The CP³ philosophy concerns putting creativity, culture and community, 'the 3 Cs', at the heart of children's learning in light of moves toward world wide educational reform which seeks to meet the complex demands of the twenty first century and as such "Our projects transform expectations, provoking those involved – the children, the teachers, the partners – to continue learning and working creatively, and invoking

³ CP will herein be an abbreviation for Creative Partnerships

shifts in thinking in the wider education system for the longer term" (*ibid*). However, focus on the 3 C's is not intended to distract from the traditional focus on the '3 R's' (reading, writing and arithmetic) but to enhance overall school improvement.

Reflecting the findings of *All Our Futures* CP aims to capitalize on the UK's reputed 'creative wealth' and engage the diverse expertise of those involved in cultural and creative industries and organizations in long term sustainable projects which to help 'animate' the entire curriculum' which it argues moves beyond the traditional arts education model engaging directly with the interests of the schools rather than being seen as a peripheral facet or activity.

CP states that one of its intentions is to provoke a debate about the nature of creativity between stakeholders involved in the program. This, I believe, is essential.

Burn (2003)⁴ argues for the establishment of "a matrix of clearly described rhetorics and clearly described stakeholder positions, contexts and interests" (*ibid*) in relation to arts educational initiatives. This rests on the premise that a range of complex and competing claims about the function and purpose of creativity are made and that these "emerge from different contexts; different artistic traditions, different academic or quasi-academic traditions and different policy contexts" (*ibid*).

Burn (2003) is interested in investigating the development, function and purpose of conceptual notions of creativity and how the varied discourses in play translate into the experience of learners. The model Burn proposes includes rhetorics of artistic practice, cognitivist, socio-cultural, economic, rhetorics of play, technologist, and popular

⁴ "Rhetorics of Creativity (Research proposal to Creative Partnerships)" A. Burn (2005)

rhetorics (ibid). This outline model appears extremely useful in trying to extrapolate the formation of discourses that surround the context of the Blueboard project in trying to identify different stakeholder contexts in terms of establishing expectancy of creative practice. Therefore, I will be referring to elements of this model in subsequent analysis.

The NACCCE report defines the *social, cultural and economic* benefits of creative and cultural development to young people and, consequently, wider society; realizing young people's potential on an individual level and as active citizens enabling participation in the workforce to support a rapidly changing economy and as part of an increasingly diverse society. It is also possible to detect references to a *cognitive* approach to creativity that stresses the role of creative thinking and the existence of different levels and kinds of intelligence aligned with the *individual* rather than on a macro social level.

At the heart of the programme is the passionate belief that everyone is inherently creative and that everyone has the right to participate in the varied and exciting culture of this country (www.creative-partnerships.com)

The democratic, socio-economic educational approach inherent in CP philosophy has been translated into the strategic delivery of the CP programme with the first wave of development being concentrated in areas classified as some of the most socially and economically challenged neighbourhoods in the country. CP Bristol, for instance, focus on clusters of schools that are located in or are able to draw on Neighborhood renewal areas. Likewise the slide in discourse between the social and cultural expectations of creativity towards the individualist and cognitive is also apparent in literature originating from CP.

Creative Partnerships was born out of an analysis that states that our schools and educational system are weighed down by their industrial origins. The system is input orientated – focused on putting facts and knowledge into children... The argument goes that instead of concentrating on inputs we need to do more to allow children to find their medium, element or true capacity during their early precious years, and to take down the barriers to their innate creativity that we subconsciously place in their way. (Matt Little, Creative Partnerships Bristol, Area Director in 'I had an idea', July 2005)

Much weight is placed on the task of unlocking and drawing out 'innate' and 'latent' creativity in young people and indications have begun to emerge that illuminate the type of discourses that inform these perceptions about the purpose and function of creativity. Yet beyond this, how is creativity defined and recognized in practice? *All our Futures* refers to 'misconceptions' of creativity and to the 'elusiveness' of the term which are based on associations; with lack of restraint, creativeness as the preserve of the gifted few and as limited to the domain of the arts as well as the by the varied theories developed to explain it.

My definition of creativity is this: Imaginative processes with outcomes that are original and of value. (Robinson: 118)

The definition of creativity as proposed in *All Our Futures* and evident in CP rhetoric echoes the ideas and theories of Professor Ken Robinson, an internationally recognized expert on the development of creativity and human resources. (This is hardly surprising as the professor chaired the NACCCE committee who produced the green paper). It is for this reason that I now turn to his seminal literature on creativity.

Out of Our Minds – Learning to be Creative (Robinson, 2001) maps the challenges of educating young people for a labour market revolutionized by 'new technologies'. Robinson argues that the economic and intellectual filters applied by the education

system are now defunct. A preoccupation with academic ability perceived as denoting general intelligence has resulted in an “incalculable waste of human talent and resources” (Robinson: 6).

Robinson describes how the advent of scientific rationality has posited the arts (associated with emotion and subjectivity) and sciences (seen as the domain of objectivity, intellect & universal ‘truths’ based on scientific evidence) as polar opposites and served to devalue the educational currency of abilities falling outside the narrow categorization of what constitutes ‘intelligence’.

It has distorted the idea of creativity in education and unbalanced the development of millions of people... Children with strong academic abilities fail to discover other abilities. Those of lower ability may have other powerful abilities that lie dormant. They can all pass through the whole of their education never knowing what their real abilities are” (Robinson: 8)

According to Robinson, creativity is augmented by engaging ‘emotional intelligence’, that is, “feelings, intuition and by a playful imagination” (ibid: 11) therefore, “The relationship between knowing and feeling is at the heart of the creative process” (ibid: 137) Robinson appraises intelligence, outlining three key characteristics as; multifaceted, interactive and dynamic and that we all possess differential intellectual profiles and creative abilities.

Returning to *All Our Futures*, the paper reiterates the different conceptions of what is involved in the process of creativity: a sectorial view; which associates creativity exclusively with the arts as opposed to the sciences (traditionally viewed as uncreative), an elite view; which views creativity as rare and unusual talent in select individuals, and

a democratic view; favoured by the committee, which “recognises the potential for creative achievement in all fields of human activity; and the capacity for such achievements in the many and not the few” (NACCCE: 31)

In terms of cultural politics, arts related discourses in particular can be characterized by polar opposition between ‘elite’ or high culture and popular culture. An example here is Paul Willis’ Gulbenkian –funded project, *Common Culture* (Willis, 1990) from which he developed a theory of cultural populism. Willis looked at the ‘cultural activities of young people’ and found that they employ a form of *symbolic creativity* in terms of appropriating products of commercial culture “in order to reshape their identities , dramatise their actions and lend authentic luster to their everyday circumstances”.(Bounds: 103)

The stipulated definition of creativity produced by the committee (mirroring the earlier quote by Robinson) that “Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value” (ibid: 31) has been used as a common point of reference in enquiries by key agencies and organizations interested in the development of creativity in schools. *“Expecting the Unexpected – Developing Creativity in Primary and Secondary Schools”* (2003) produced by OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) used the definition and specified characteristics as a basis for identifying good practice in promoting creativity in schools.

Creative processes have four characteristics. First, they always involve thinking or behaving imaginatively. Second, this imaginative activity is purposeful: that is, it is directed to achieve an objective. Third, these processes must generate something original. Fourth, the outcome must be of value in relation to the objective”
(OFSTED: 4)

Craft (2004) enlarges on these characteristics in that the creative process involves producing ideas or artifacts which can be shared and judged to be of value by either the child themselves, their peers or by others such as teachers. The 'originality' of the work occurs on different levels so "we are not talking about originality on global terms" but "within the framework of a child's current knowledge. Children need to understand what the conventions are in any form which they are exploring, in order to intentionally depart from these" (Craft: webpage).

Robinson (2003) clarifies his perception of originality which is not necessarily equated with the 'new' but which may occur on series of relative levels; personal, social and historic. Similarly, Robinson assesses that one of the main elements of the creative process is centered 'on the importance of the medium, which needs to be controlled and as such leads to play and risk taking and the need for critical judgment'. (Robinson: 110)

Loveless (2003) reviews literature relating to creativity and new media and refers to the link between play and creativity which has been cited mainly in support of psychological models of learning.

Creativity is an essential life skill, which needs to be fostered by the education system(s) from the early years onward (Craft 1999, p137). Such a statement emphasises the importance of playfulness, imagination and creativity in learning for children, young people and adults and the role that schools might play in promoting these qualities in learning experiences (Loveless:7)

An analysis of research and literature on Creativity and Education (2001) conducted by Anna Craft for OCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) pointed toward the speculative nature of critical discussion on creativity. Craft provides a historical overview

of traditions in the approach to studying and theorizing creativity starting with notions of divine 'inspiration' associated with creativity which can be found far back in religious traditions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam. During the European romantic era inspiration and artistic practice came to be understood as originating from within human beings and expression of human emotion and originality as intrinsic to the creative process were greatly valued, as was the notion of the 'creative genius'.

Following the end of the nineteenth century which saw increasing interest in how to foster creativity from a philosophical approach, researchers turned to empirical investigations of creativity using the new discipline of psychology (prominently in the 1950's). Analysts looking for psychological determinants of creativity largely worked in four key traditions including psychoanalytic (e.g. Freudian study of human drives), cognitive (intelligence; e.g. divergent and creative thinking), behaviorist and humanistic (realizing individual needs and potential). These traditions, as Craft points out, have continued to influence the framework of researchers and led to further work on personal and cognitive determinants of creative capability.

For example the work of Cropley (2001) who characterizes creativity as the production of novelty, (that is, *an effective and ethical product, course of action or ideas which departs from the familiar*), emphasizes the psychological and personal processes leading to the production of novelty.

Actual creative behaviour results from interactions among abilities and knowledge, personal properties, motivation and the properties of the surrounding social environment. (Cropley:2)

Significantly since the 1980's/90's the emphasis has shifted from an outcome linked and product based approach towards a greater focus on the creativity in terms of intelligence; furthermore philosophical debates on creativity in the 70's recognized creativity's connections to 'imaginativeness'.

Within the realms of education concern about developing creativity in young people has been prevalent since the 1950's (implying educational approaches can be instrumental to the process) and the criteria of resultant studies reflects the different theories of creativity that abound. A framework has evolved over the last twenty five years which identifies the role of social systems in stimulating creativity and as such both social and cognitive conditions, the micro and macro environment, public and private spheres of life are seen as pivotal to the process of fostering creativity.

Subsequently this has resulted in a methodological leaning, typically from positivist empirical studies towards an ethnographic, qualitative approach which places the everyday experiences and situations of 'ordinary' people at the heart of research. During the 1960's pedagogy in education reflected discovery based, child centered practice favoring the arts as aligned with creativity, as a desirable educational aim but subsequent criticism regarding the perceived excessive freedom resulting in this approach led to the development of the subject and content based National Curriculum in late 1980's. The compartmentalization of knowledge into subject disciplines served to further polarize the arts, science and humanities reinforcing traditional educational discourses.

Different subjects employ distinct repertoires to talk about themselves, not just in terms of specialized vocabularies, but employing different value systems and even drawing on different models of thinking and learning (Sefton-Green 2000:2)

Since the mid 1990's there has been growing commentary and criticism arguing that creativity in learning is an essential aim of education, a claim which has been bolstered by the economic rationale that creativity capacity is essential to business. Amid the debate the Secretary of State for Education and Employment called for a number of advisory groups to be set up to in order to contribute to the debate resulting in the NACCCE advisory group's report *All Our Futures*.

Craft (2001) concludes that although there is clearly a large body of work and debate on the nature of creativity there is little conclusive evidence analyzing the process of developing creativity in learners, in assessing pupil's creativity and into learner transmission and progression of creativity, areas which need clarification and further investigation.

Facilitating creative development requires the teaching of knowledge and skills, together with opportunities to speculate and experiment. This is a sophisticated process that combines elements of what are thought of as traditional and progressive education. (Robinson: 199/200)

OFSTED (2003) identify five integrated features of good teaching leading to successful development of creativity: 1) an understanding of creativity 2) providing the opportunity 3) subject knowledge 4) positive relationships 5) assessment.

Teachers who inspire creativity have a clear understanding of what it means to be creative. Although, they are not always able to put this understanding into words, they often can, if appropriate model the creative process for pupils, with all the attendant risk-taking this can involve. (OFSTED: 8)

I would argue that this quote illustrates the key problematic as identified by Burn (2005). The review of theories concerning the function, purpose and definition of creativity has shown that there a complex series of paradigms and traditions which permeate consequent conceptions and expectations about the nature, practice and development of creativity in learners. Therefore, in the context of effective delivery how can we ascertain the type and level of understanding of creativity of individual stakeholders and how does this contrast with other stake holder's perceptions, amid the current ambiguity that surrounds creativity? Moreover, given this situation how will this translate to the experience of learners?

I support Craft's call for further investigation into the facilitation of creative learning but this will only be effective and meaningful if the individual and collective stakeholder positions can be identified and understood, in other words if the terms of reference and expectations of participants are recognized vis-à-vis the rhetorics which inform them.

Crucially, the legacy of scientific discourse within the study of creativity continues to frame critical contemporary discussion based on integrative personal, cognitive and social influents. Commentators such as Robinson (2001) and Cropley (2001) habitually reference the 'reality' and 'truth' of creativity which bear the hallmarks of positivist and essentialist rhetoric. Furthermore, Cropley employs a quantitative, classificatory approach to the measurement and assessment of creativity. My difficulty with this approach is that it appears, at times, contradictory and ultimately whilst acknowledging the social element involved in the process of developing creativity, it simultaneously

obscures the act of *defining* creativity as a social process, historically and culturally specific and therefore subject to flux and change.

In analyzing a recent publication, "I had an Idea" (2005) by Creative Partnerships Bristol, intended to reflect *the learning journey so far*, I surveyed the terminology used which includes references to "true capacity", "subconscious", "innate creativity" "open society" and "children as unconstrained dreamers". A range of vocabulary characteristic of scientific/biological, psychological (individual; fulfillment) and sociological (economic, social and cultural; inclusion) paradigms punctuate theoretical literature influential in the work of Creative Partnerships resulting in a complex, hazy and sometimes contradictory picture of expectations of creative practice and development.

The rationale for developing partnerships between organizations and businesses within the 'creative sector' and schools takes its cue from the traditional association of arts with creativity and the exclusive practice of inviting artists to work in schools in order to enhance pupils understanding of the subject.

The pedagogy of non-arts subjects does not tend to view experience of professional practices as central to a full understanding of the subject (Sinker: 155)

Sefton-Green (2000) maintains these ideas are linked to a set of broader arguments about the function and purpose of arts education including fostering; personal development, cultural expression, citizenship, appreciation of arts and literature to vocational training. In contrast, reflecting key developments in thinking about creativity, NACCCE set out the democratic aims of creative and cultural development and the

necessity of creativity in all areas of activity in education, as transmutable through engaging in collaborations with outside partners. Furthermore, *All Our Futures* identified *community and arts led* organizations as having *social* significance, (as opposed to solely an economic claim for the creative ‘industries’) invoking associations with the tradition of ‘community arts’.

The notion of arts in the community was built on left wing ideals of social inclusion, local provision, access for all and multiculturalism... community arts were also seen as a challenge to an education system, which was judged to replicate or even instigate social and cultural hierarchies, disenfranchising sections of the community and closing off their opportunities for creative production. Among other things, community arts centers set up initiatives aimed at giving young people the opportunity to express themselves through creative arts practice, particularly in urban areas of poverty and deprivation (Sinker:156)

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

The network of discourses of creativity in relation to the rationale underpinning the development of fashioning partnerships between schools and professionals involved in the creative and cultural sector, particularly, community based organizations constitutes a complex and contradictory web of paradigmatic approaches to theorizing creativity and education which are bound by wider social, political, cultural and economic concerns.

The influences of psychological theories of creativity couched in rationalistic scientific terms resound in the individual cognitive and psychological ascriptions of creativity apparent in descriptions of creative activity espoused by the NACCCE report for example who have directly influenced the work of Creative Partnerships. So too, the socio-cultural emphasis concerning democratization and the development of creativity which is possible in all young people, moving beyond sectorial and elite notions of

creativity. Polarized and compartmental educational approaches to education with an academic preoccupation have been called into question and re-balancing is urged in terms of recognizing the benefits to pupils overall attainment of developing their creative capacities. In the tangle of discourse teachers and practitioners on the ground are charged with the task of collaborative delivery yet as has been identified there remains little research into the process of fostering creativity in pupils or into practicing creatively and how young people's creative development might be assessed.

The task of this research is to explore whether the discursive formation described above causes ambiguities in terms of the shared understandings and expectancy of creative practice in the context of the Blueboard project and based on the review of relevant literature in this chapter there are clearly indications suggesting the propensity for confusion.

Furthermore, as an adjunct to this it has raised the notion that the heavy discursive emphasis on individual, cognitive determinants of creativity are threatening to overwhelm the cultural understandings of the purpose and function of fostering creativity.

This chapter has pursued discussion through to the juncture, in educational terms, of the formal with the informal, with school and community based practice. The *context* of organizations and companies involved in *Blueboard*, with a history of community media project work with young people, will be the subject of investigation in the coming chapter. Here I will be focusing on the origins and traditions informing the ethos and approach of practitioners using digital media in predominantly *informal* settings and in the final analysis assessing how this contributes to the already complex

picture of expectancy surrounding creative practice and development presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

'Informal' Formalities

Many who work as informal educators do not describe themselves as such. They may opt for labels that reflect their 'client groups' or where they work (Jeffs: 3)

According to Jeffs and Smith (1996) *educators* are those involved in fostering environments for learning, as such they consider them to be *teachers*, however what sets informal⁵ and formal educators apart is the specific context which they work; the where and the how? Workers based in the community who aim to create learning opportunities for its members, approach their work in particular ways and with varied motivations however they assert they share a common ethos and commitment to fostering democracy.

Jeffs and Smith identify a number of key characteristics associated with informal education; that it is participant, it engages people in conversation, it seeks to foster learning, it happens in everyday (non-formal) settings and where there is a commitment to political and social change. Informal education aims to reach a wide cross section of society, particularly groups which are marginalized or disenfranchised.

As informal educators we often seek to create a 'forked road', to encourage people to explore what is going on. This we do by asking questions and

⁵ 'Informal education' is understood, in the context of this research, as organized educational activities that take place outside formal systems of education.

engaging in conversations that challenge the 'accepted', creating events or changing the environment (Jeffs: 6)

The informal sector is very different in terms of teaching and learning to the formal education sector. Engagement with opportunities is voluntary so activities provided are typically more responsive to demand and therefore flexible. Connecting with young people's interests – popular and youth cultures – becomes a means by which activities are kept relevant and appealing. (NYA/BFI 7)

In this context, learning is a progressive activity which is concerned with stimulating development and growth on an individual and societal level underpinned by particular values, and as such “embraces a respect for persons, a belief in democracy, a commitment to fairness and equality” (Jeffs: 10). This is reflected in the terminology employed in informal educational discourse where learners are commonly referred to as participants and educators as facilitators, serving to recognise both as equal partners in the learning process.

Adults are more likely to see their role as facilitators of individual young person's interests in learning new skills rather than as disseminators of knowledge. The action based approach to learning in this sector can be highly effective – particularly for those with an aversion to text based approaches – and engenders problem solving skills not developed by more passive modes of learning (NYA/BFI:6)

The images we have of educators are of chalk and talk: of classrooms, rows of desks, lessons, exams, battles for order, punishments (Jeffs: 4)

The dualism that exists between informal and formal educationalists is a result of the different traditions, philosophies and ideologies that inform the nature and purpose of their work. Commonly, informal educationalists are usually defined in terms of ‘what they're not’ (ibid), in other words youth workers and community workers are ‘not teachers’ and this reflects the disequilibrium that exists in terms of the perceived value of informal education vis-à-vis formal education in wider society.

Informal educationalists cannot control or manage learning environments and learner exchanges in the same way as teachers and are less able to specify the subject matter unlike formal educationalists do according to the curriculum. The connotations of informal education as non-academic, process orientated, unconstrained, challenging the status quo and lacking a linear connection with development for the labour market has devalued it in terms of the traditional criteria of formal education.

Conversely, this polarisation has exacerbated the notion of *education* per-se as disconnected with the democratic and social aims of those working to create learning opportunities within communities frequently resulting in the distancing of community work with *educational* aims and objectives.

However, amid the contemporary social and political climate there are growing calls for an integrated approach to education, such as those set out in *All Our Futures* favouring an overtly democratic, learner centred approach, with less exclusive emphasis on product over process, recognizing these conditions as necessary for developing creativity leading to personal fulfilment and full participation as active citizens and economic contributors to society. Furthermore, in order to develop a strategic approach to fulfilling the aims of creative and cultural development of young people along the lines suggested above the *social* significance of community based creative and cultural organisations is seen as crucial.

Community Media

Community Media - A definition: A loose structure of independent companies and individuals working on media related broadcast, transmission and

educational activities at a community level. The work happening in the Community Media sector can generally be divided into Communication Platforms and Educational Activities, with the former being primarily concerned with providing access to broadcast/transmission platforms, and the latter concerned with access to production equipment, skills and promoting the educational potential of the participant group. (Sobers: 6)

Sobers (2005) aims to examine how educational work within the community media sector can be made more sustainable and identifies two distinct strands, in order to distinguish the different aims and objectives in operation, areas which he argues are often confused and converge under the remit of 'media democracy' and which blur the boundaries between exclusively political objectives, and educational, creative motivations for engaging in community based media production.

Sobers model locates community broadcast ("structures and activities within the community media sector that most directly emulate the traditional media industry") and media democracy ("structures that have been established to consciously undermine traditional media, to re-dress the balance between the reporters and the reported... the most overtly political of the two areas") as forming the *community platforms* and, media education ("educational activity carried out with the direct motivations of aiming to inspire the participants to become aspiring creative media practitioners") and media in education ("aims to encourage participants to use media tools as a means of raising levels of other areas of their development... such as communication skills, literacy, confidence, decision making, etc") as constituents of *educational activity* (Ibid: 5). According to Sobers, work carried out under *community platforms* is mostly commonly identified as representative of community media in general reference to the sector. Furthermore, the nuances within these areas can be

acute such as varying emphasis on process and product led approaches which all serve to compound the complexity of how community media is defined and understood.

In terms of identifying key characteristics related to enhancing understanding of the sector, the National Youth Agency/British Film Institute report *Being Seen, Being Heard – Young People and Moving Image Production* (2002), which attempts to map informal sector provision of moving image production opportunities for young people in the UK, outlines six key strands which share similar aims but have diverse origins and philosophies relating to their approach to this provision in terms of relationships to various pedagogies, levels of participation and aspects of process and product emphasis.

Youth Work: using video as a 'social tool' aiming to empower participants to become active citizens and to understand their relationships with the social world, encouraging critical skills.

Community Media: Associated with community arts movement of 1970's and 1980's giving community groups access to the means of producing a video and to articulate social issues.

Youth and Community Arts: Linked to the community media movement, often combined with arts education pedagogies, broadening possibilities for cultural production, giving 'voice' to young people and opportunities for self expression.

Participatory video: pedagogy of active participation, video used as tool for engaging individuals and groups within communities for personal and social development.

Film and TV production: employing industry structures, emphasis on vocational training and high production values and where broadcast is crucial.

Film-making Workshops: Typically one-off, taster sessions offering younger children, particularly, the chance to experience moving image media. Often critical skills are encouraged and exploration of film language.

(NYA/BFI: 26/27)

These categories are not intended to be mutually exclusive of each other and the boundaries habitually blur and are reworked, transmuted according to different priorities and delivery contexts.

Individuals and organisations approach youth media production with quite different aims and motivations; and their work is led by a range of different imperatives relating to the institutional context and funding ('Changing Images: Promoting Youth Media Production' IOE: 2004)

Unlike formal education which has a 'captive' audience, creative work in community arts settings is often piecemeal because it is dependant on periodic or one-off funding and is usually undertaken on a project-by-project basis. (Sinker: 156)

One consistent factor that epitomizes the work of community digital practitioners is; fragmentary and sporadic funding and when combined with the optional nature of participants engagement with provision this tends to limit the breadth and sustainability of subsequent learning opportunities.

The 'social' significance of the community media sector in contrast to the 'economic' significance of the 'creative industries' serves to posit the former as the 'poor relative' of the latter in literal as well as figurative terms.

The creative industries are worth £1 billion to the South West (South West Screen: 2004)

500 specialist digital subsidiaries of traditional media groups produce an annual turnover of about £187.5m. The work of these companies and individuals has given the UK an international reputation as having recognized indigenous talent for creative ideas and cultural innovation" (NACCCE: 221)

In light of economic imperatives necessary for survival, coupled with different motivations, aims, origins and the intrinsic platforms open to community media practitioners they are duly chameleon like, fluid and commonly straddle these domains

such as forging links with commercial and corporate broadcast companies/organizations to further the aims of their own organizations where appropriate and in pursuing independent commissions for production work, however, the latter are usually engagements with public sector groups reflecting their particular ethos; principally social, democratic aspirations.

It is intended that research interviews with practitioners involved the Blueboard project will enable investigation and analysis vis-à-vis how the models and categorizations outlined above relate to their ethos and practice using digital media, particularly, film and video, working predominantly within community learning environments.

Media Education

The rationales that underpin activity in the informal sector are different from those found in schools. They may emphasize the enrichment value of media activities ...There is not always a clear rationale for developing media literacy, for example a framework of key ideas and concepts to underpin teaching and learning. Improving vocational skills is sometimes an element within the rationale of such activity. (Mapping Media Literacy: section 5 summary)

Media Education is the process of teaching and learning about the media rather than with or through it. Moreover, it concerns developing “both critical understanding and active participation. It enables young people to interpret and make informed judgements as consumers of media; but it also enables them to become producers of media in their own right. Media education is about developing young people’s critical *and* creative abilities” (Buckingham: 4). Media literacy is the outcome of media education.

Ofcom⁶ is putting media literacy at the heart of education to produce an informed, intelligent and engaged public. In today's world where technological competence is a necessity, media literacy is as important as the 3 'R's'. (South West Screen: 2004)

It is the aspect of *critical* thinking about the role and function of the media (as in, the spectrum of modern communications media e.g. television, radio, video, cinema and the internet) that eludes the rationale of much informal sector activity and there are understandable reasons for this. Firstly, it may not be appropriate for media activities that emphasise enjoyment, leisure and enrichment as principle outcomes to stress the need for conceptual understanding of the media.

Secondly, providers of vocational training in production skills may deem it unnecessary to develop participant's critical understanding of media theory and practice (although many would argue that this is in fact essential part of informing production content).

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the fact remains that the sector is under resourced and there are too few workers with relevant practical and theoretical skills to develop these approaches. Furthermore, "there is no forum to bring together practitioners in all types of education to explore, share and disseminate good practise" (Mapping Media Literacy: Section 1: 13)

Fundamentally it appears that the majority of digital media practitioners within the informal sector do not identify the remit of developing media literacy, in this sense, as part of their proviso. Media education has been identified as one of the objectives

⁶ Ofcom – Office of Communications: the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries, with responsibilities across television, radio, telecommunications and wireless communications services. (Source www.ofcom.org.uk)

under the community media umbrella (e.g. Sobers 2005) but is conceptualized differently, frequently in terms of learning production skills, becoming a producer and vocational training. This clearly does not equate to a critical awareness of digital media forms in terms of wider media consumption; to an understanding of how media production industries have evolved and how they function to produce particular representations and ideas.

The parameters of this research limits in depth consideration of this point but it is something that clearly warrants further investigation. The fact remains it is worth practitioners considering that when objectives involve trying to effect social change whether on an individual level or at the level of whole communities, the pivotal role of the media in our lives in terms of both consumption and production necessitates some degree of *critical* reflection which therefore creates opportunities to enhance learners understanding of wider social relationships.

Making Connections

Probably many involved in the informal sector would be uncomfortable in describing what they do as teaching, because they associate it with formality and a lack of focus on what young people want to learn (Mapping Media Literacy: section 9: 46)

Steven Goodman (2003) advocates a 'more learner centred and community based' approach to developing media literacy in young people within formal education settings, an approach which he identifies succeeds in acknowledging where young people 'are at' and successfully engages them in learning about the world through exploring their own interests, avoiding the 'disconnect' caused by a failure of educators

and the formal curriculum to acknowledge the social and cultural contexts which their students occupy.

Conversely the informal approach adopted by community media workers has been sharply criticised for its accompanying lack of criteria in terms of learning objectives and hence strategic evaluation of learning outcomes.

There is no strategy for evaluating the quality of what young people understand and can do as a result of interventions in this sector (Mapping Media Literacy:71)

Media production activities are frequently described in terms of their ability to promote 'social and communication skills' or to develop 'self-esteem' and 'self-awareness', but the criteria by which these things might be identified are rarely well defined (Changing Images: Buck. et al: 2004:6)

In order to create effective models of evaluation stipulating aims and objectives of community-based media work the different motivations, origins and strands informing practice within the community educational sector need to be explored and made explicit. Similarly different theories about how learning takes place within these settings needs to become clearer for instance, community orientated media projects with 'social' outcomes tend to be characterised by a 'learning by doing' or constructivist approach emphasizing personal growth and development and the benefits of community participation whereas projects with a vocational emphasis reference knowledge within the bounds of communities rather than specific individual psychology and could be termed situated learning. (Changing Images: Buck. et al: 2004)

Many practitioners involved in the informal sector would like to offer recursive experiences in media production, something more sustained than the

workshop model prevalent for many years and still the mainstay of many informal sector activities. However, for experiences to be recursive there needs to be models of learning progression which are both practical and theoretical, and which combine the 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes characterised by the formal and informal sectors. (NYA/BFI: 99)

In light of these criticisms leveled at both informal and formal sector approaches to providing opportunities for young people to engage in media production, and concurrent to the call for collaboration between community and arts organizations and schools with regard to fostering creativity, researchers advocate capitalizing on informal/formal partnerships to exact changes addressing these concerns.

If the potential link between schools and informal education institutions is capitalized on, it should mean a change in pedagogy from the school's point of view, taking on board some of the active learning principles fostered by community arts practice. By the same token we might expect community arts practice to change in terms of making the explicit the skills and knowledge involved in the whole creative process. (NYA/BFI: 100)

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the complex nature of the contexts in which digital media practitioners, such as those involved in Blueboard, engage in educational activities with communities in informal environments, stemming from shifting priorities and variable aims and objectives, rooted in particular traditions, which shape practice and approach.

Furthermore, a number of key concerns have been raised in the course of reviewing related literature regarding the need to make explicit these factors in order to establish criteria necessary for evaluating learner outcomes, alongside the need for further investigation into perceptions about the nature and purpose of media education.

Although some of the learning *conditions* within the community media sector reflect those advocated by proponents of developing creativity as a fundamental tenet of educational practice, as yet, any overtly *creative* imperative directing this work, in terms of specific aims and objectives pointing towards the benefits of fostering *creativity*, *per-se*, still remains to be demonstrated, although, habitual reference is made to the nature of the work as being *creative*. It is my understanding therefore, that creativity in this context is perceived to be implicit, where alluded to, within the process of engaging communities in media production, which I suggest, is by virtue either of the traditional association of this work with community arts activity (and therefore the notion that any form of artistic practice is inherently creative) or by employing the tools of digital media in the process of production whereby creativity is consequently elicited in participants. The following chapter follows through the issue of the efficacy of using digital media technologies to induce and enhance creativity in learners.

In conclusion, carrying forward the key issues raised in this chapter the field research with practitioners aims to explore the perceptions and actual experiences of practitioners in terms of their professional identities relating to notions of *education* and *teaching* and *community media*. It will seek to examine the approach of practitioners in relation to establishing learning objectives in order to engage in evaluation of learning outcomes which it has been indicated has been crucially lacking in informal approaches to education. Finally, it will look for signs of an explicit creative imperative guiding the work of practitioners.

CHAPTER THREE

The Role of Digital Technologies

The process of making media has a history within both the formal and informal education sector, the latter of which was discussed at some length in the previous chapter. As illustrated a wide range of motivations and philosophies inform this work and as such aims range for example from using media as an outlet for young people's self-expression to vocational and technical training and notably both sectors tend to emphasise the enhancement of social and communication skills as a benefit of practical production, however as was also demonstrated the boundaries often blur between rationales for engaging young people in production activities. In terms of formal education, practical production using media has become ever popular in a wide range of areas relating to the curriculum and therefore the aims and approaches, and underlying origins underpinning practice, employed by teachers in schools can be equally wide ranging, although teaching within the formal education system results in particular institutional constraints which are somewhat universal such as adherence to the national curriculum and measurement of attainment targets.

Students might use photography as a form of creative expression in Art lessons, for example, or as a means of presenting data from their Geography field trip. They might use audio tape in producing a play in English, or to record interviews for an oral history project in History or social studies (Buckingham/Graham/Sefton-Green: 1)

Buckingham, et al (1995) draws a useful distinction between *teaching through media* and *teaching about media*. This distinction was discussed in chapter two but should

be reiterated in order to clarify how practical media production taught by educators can be further understood and conceptualised. In the case of the former the media are typically used instrumentally to enable the teaching of content or skills relating to particular subject areas. In this respect, it is argued there is little or no critical analysis of how media texts are characteristically produced or how media representations are constructed reflecting particular ideas or connotations about wider society. Conversely, media education involves 'systematic reflection' of the content and form of media texts and of the contexts of production and consumption, through engaging in critical analysis and practical production.

Buckingham, et al (1995) identify four key interlacing versions of practical media production in education *practical work as self-expression* (associated with formal Arts and English teaching for example with an emphasis on individual creativity allowing room for a degree of experimentation), *Practical work as a method of learning* (i.e. instrumental learning), *Practical work as vocational training* and *practical work as deconstruction* (to oppose and subvert dominant notions of professional practice).

Such distinctions are useful in trying to appraise the expectancy of the role of *media* in engendering creative practice because evidently the affordances of the technology itself cannot be isolated from the pedagogies and traditions which influence its application and purpose.

Much hype has surrounded the advent of digital technologies, particularly the implications for its use in formal education but also beyond the classroom in informal

education settings and within the home. Retrospectively pre-digital technology proved unreliable, laborious, and relatively expensive and afforded limited access to equipment. The introduction of digital cameras and editing software, which are cheaper and easier to use has allowed greater access to the means of production and has resulted in increasing use of the technology by those providing formal and informal learning opportunities and in terms of increasing use in the home of more recent media forms such as computer games. In the case of digital video for example cameras are increasingly user friendly, with greater picture quality and footage can be easily stored, manipulated, integrated with other media forms and shared across a range of ICT platforms. (Buckingham, Harvey and Sefton-Green, 1999 and Becta 2003)

Digital technologies exhibit features of provisionality, interactivity, capacity, range, speed and automatic functions which enable users to do things that could not be done as effectively, or at all, using other tools. (Loveless: 3)

Using equipment that is now much more easily available, not just in their own homes or peer groups but also in formal and informal education, young people can participate much more readily in activities such as music production, image manipulation, design, and desktop or website publishing (Sefton-Green: 1999: 2)

Although, some young people have access to computers and digital technology at home, many do not, reflecting wider social inequalities and as such schools, it is argued, should equalize young people's access to equipment. (Buckingham, Harvey and Sefton-Green 1999).

According to research by Becta⁷ (2003) it has been suggested that the use of digital video in schools: "increases motivation and engagement, develops literacy skills, can be

⁷ BECTA: British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

used across the curriculum and age phases and accommodates different learner styles and abilities” (Becta ICT Research Paper 2003). Furthermore, enlarging on the key benefits available to students Becta research finds that digital video can tap into the out of school interests of students, its use can increase self-esteem and feelings of accomplishment as well as social and communication skills, it can enable students work to be easily shared with parents and the wider community and it encourages self-expression and creativity. However, these benefits cannot be extrapolated from the pedagogy involved in the learning experience and furthermore some of them can be equally analogous to older analogue media.

In short the efficacy of using digital video in this context; which is equally applicable to other digital media technology such as digital cameras used for photography, is dependant on the type of approach to teaching adopted, the teacher’s knowledge and understanding relative to the activity, sustained opportunities to engage in production work and, of course, access to appropriate equipment. Critically for the purposes of this analysis researchers such as Reid et al (2002) have identified developing conceptual understanding of creativity as a requisite factor in terms of teaching using digital video and in the assessment of pupils production work.

It is important to note that it is not the access to digital resources which ‘delivers’ creativity, but the opportunities such access affords for interaction, participation and the active demonstration of imagination, production, purpose, originality and value. (Loveless: 9)

In congruence with *All Our Futures* the 1999 report by NACCCE the Becta pilot project intended to explore the impact of using digital video on student’s creativity. As such

creativity was defined as activity involving: "Thinking and behaving imaginatively", and where "Activity is purposeful", "The process generates something original to the individual" and "The outcome must be of value in relation to the objective". (Reid et al: Appendix F).

Significantly, the findings revealed that observation of teaching using digital video indicated it was "the most appropriate medium for communicating ideas, feelings and information. But there was some confusion and uncertainty in teachers understanding of what might constitute creative work with DV", furthermore, "This might have been because DV work in schools is relatively new, so that any new work is produced in this medium can be labeled as "creative". In addition, "some teachers appeared to operate with a model that equated creativity with originality and freedom from constraint. This in turn implied that the teacher had no clear role in supporting pupil's creative processes" (Reid et al: section 3.1/3.2)

Buckingham, Harvey and Sefton-Green 1999 underline the role *cultural*/skills and competencies play in being able use technology creatively and productively. In this respect, access alone is not the sole issue; moreover it is crucial to address the social disadvantages that exist amongst young people in terms of their social and cultural contexts. For example, in their experience they found that middle class children were privy to knowledge cascaded as result of their parent's familiarity with computers and were equipped with significant social and cultural competencies relating to the 'new technologies'.

The problem of differential prior knowledge has particular implications for the relationship between technical skill and creative ability. Students tend to imagine only what they know they can actually make; as they become more

proficient in technical skills, this in turn changes their capacity to think creatively about what they are doing (Buckingham, Harvey and Sefton-Green: 13)

This has been expressed in terms of the notion of developing 'cultural capital' and therefore recursive and recurrent opportunities to engage pupils in digital media use should be incorporated into the pedagogic strategies employed by educators.

Chapter Summary & Conclusion

Creativity can be promoted and extended with the use of new technologies where there is understanding of, and opportunities for, the variety of creative processes in which learners can engage. Key issues to be discussed by those interested in creativity in education include the understandings of 'creativity'; the features of ICT which enable learners to be creative; the creative activities which are already going on and the contexts in which learners can realise their creative potential. (Loveless: 12)

Digital technology, it seems, can play a pivotal role in fostering creativity and allow affordances that other tools do not but this is dependant upon the way in which learners are encouraged to use it and how its purpose is understood by educators; in conjunction with an understanding of the nature and purpose of creativity, an understanding of how to create the conditions necessary for creative development and in developing criteria by which the value of creativity activity can be assessed.

Digital technologies afford the capacity to increase and equalize young people's access to engage in production activities however, the element of developing 'cultural capital' is seen as an essential part of this process, that is, providing young people with recurrent and recursive opportunities to engage with media is as crucial as contact with the technology itself.

I will be seeking to find out how the practitioners involved in Blueboard perceive the affordances of digital media, e.g. in terms of increasing access, integration with other

digital platforms and distribution, etc, in terms of expectation and reality in the context of the project context and whether this relates to the adoption of a specific pedagogical approach (and if practitioners are minded to creating recurrent and reflexive opportunities for young people to engage in production work vis-à-vis the notion of cultural capital).

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

Research Style

I have adopted a style of research which, appears to straddle the paradigms of critical and interpretive theory. It is an anti-positivist stance, that is to say, it rejects realist positioning.

Positivism concerns the use of science to objectively discover universal laws and “truths” that govern society and human behaviour. As such it “involves the view of social scientists as analysts or interpreters of their subject matter. Positivism may be characterised by its claim that science provides us with the clearest possible ideal of knowledge” (Cohen et al: 9). This nomothetic style, with a macro emphasis, employs scientific rationale and experimental methods to deduce universal rules and laws to validate theory.

In contrast, subjective, interpretive research is based on the discovering how people interpret the world they live in. As such, the basis for understanding the social world and human behaviour stems from the discovering how meaningful relationships and exchanges impact on human action.

Anti-positivists would argue that individuals’ behaviour can only be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of reference; understanding of individuals’ interpretations of the world has to come from inside, not the outside. Social science is thus seen as subjective undertaking, as a means of dealing with the direct experience of people in specific contexts (Cohen et al: 20)

Interpretive approaches have been criticised for their inclination towards micro sociological enquiries at the expense of considering how external social structures can impact on subject's behaviour.

Whilst positivism strives for the discovery of causality through observing phenomena, interpretive paradigms are concerned with meanings and interpretations. *Critical educational research* regards these approaches as deficient accounts of human behaviour based on their disregard of the political and ideological contexts in which research occurs.

Critical theory is explicitly prescriptive and normative... Its intention is not merely to give an account of society and behaviour but to realize a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its members. Its purpose is not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them. In particular it seeks to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society (Cohen et al: 28)

One of the fundamental criticisms of critical theory is the overtly political agenda of the research which undermines the capacity of the enquirer to remain objective and detached. Critical theorists retort that it is precisely the inert, disinterest of researchers that allows social inequalities to be maintained and that the nature of critique is in itself value laden. Furthermore, claims for emancipation through action research have been questioned in terms of whether this results in real possibilities for participant researchers to acquire political power.

The aims of any action research project or program are to bring about practical improvement, innovation, change or development of social practise, and the practitioners' better understanding of their practices (Skerrit quoted in Cohen et al:227)

As stated in the introductory chapter, the impetus or 'agenda' for this research stems from a desire to engage in reflective practice, to develop insights that relate to my personal professional practice in a field where specific theory relating to the work of, practitioners and educators, working with digital media forms whose foundations are rooted in informal, commonly, community based contexts is 'thin on the ground'. Therefore, the purpose of engaging with research is that it will provide a basis for reviewing approach and practice and in doing so may inform change and the professional development of other practitioners.

Action research is taken to involve the participation of the researcher in tackling a particular problem, making an intervention and monitoring the effects. I would consider that in contrast to this my role could be more accurately described as a participant observer in that rather than making any direct interventions in the course of research, my study of the case of fellow practitioners, in conjunction with my experience of a practitioner involved in work with the Blueboard pilot project will produce useful points of reference and stimulate opportunities for practitioners to think reflexively about issues surrounding their professional practice.

Notwithstanding, my approach to this research encapsulates a number key characteristics of action Research in that ' it enhances the competencies of participants; it is collaborative; it is undertaken directly in situ; it seeks to improve the quality of human actions; it is participatory; it frequently uses case study; it is formative such that the definition of the problem, the aims & methodology may alter during the process of action research; it is methodologically eclectic and it strives to render the research usable and shareable by participants' (Hult and Lunning & McKernan in Cohen et al: 228)

In summary, whilst a critical research style presupposes examining, analyzing and critiquing in order to transform actions and interests bound up in relationships of power on a macro and micro level, I am also borrowing from interpretive traditions in so far as I am interested in understanding the perceptions and ascription of meanings by way of which practitioners understand and make sense of their practice.

Case studies, in not having to seek frequencies of occurrences, can replace quantity with quality and intensity, separating the significant few from the insignificant many instances of behaviour. Significance rather than frequency is a hallmark of case studies, offering the researcher an insight into the real dynamics of situations and people (Cohen et al: 185)

I have elected to use a case study approach in order to organize and shape my research. The benefits of using such an approach in this instance is that it will allow me to conduct in depth research concentrating on the experiences of practitioners, which is case specific, taking into account individual contexts.

The common pitfalls identified with employing a case study approach is that research lacks rigor, structure and results in superfluous amounts of data. Furthermore, the characteristic singularity of the approach has been criticized for rendering the theories derived incapable of universal generalization. Simons (cited in Bassey, 1999:36) welcomes this paradox, in challenging *certainty*, and points out the assumption of polarity implicit in this observation which it is argued embodies a particular view of research.

I recognize the limits of this approach and will resist making all encompassing generalized statements on this basis however as mentioned earlier I am more concerned with creating a stimulus for discussion and to contribute to collectively opening up opportunities for community based practitioners using digital media in an

educational capacity to reflect on their own practice rather than to exact 'spectacular' and 'earth shattering' social change.

Research Techniques

The case studies generated will present qualitative data drawing on transcripts from semi structured interviews conducted with three practitioners, representing two of the four companies/organisations involved in the Blueboard project.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter I sought to select two partnerships that appeared to offer contrasting yet comparable experiences in the context of their organizational profiles of engagement not only with *Creative Partnerships* but with digital media project work and also in the context of the schools with whom they have been collaborating.

I conducted interviews with practitioners at the end of the residency period. I also had the opportunity to observe digital media production activity taking place within the schools in which they were resident on a couple of occasions however this observation does not form the basis of material included in the case study.

Further information exchange was made possible by regular bi-monthly review meetings between all participating media companies/organizations accompanied by update reports produced by the practitioners. An intranet website was also accessible to practitioners for the purposes of information exchange and communication although in practise this was barely used during the residency period.

I conducted one interview lasting approximately one and a half hours with a single practitioner representing one of the production companies and the second interview lasting approximately two hours was conducted with two practitioners representing a separate participating organization.

I generated a number of prepared questions designed to address the key research aims and hypothesis although the semi structured nature of the interview exacted some overlapping and tangential discussion. The interview was recorded on mini disc and accordingly transcribed.

Prior to the interviews I produced evaluation forms to be completed by the practitioners and where possible with the teaching staff with whom they were collaborating. These were intended to serve a dual purpose in terms of generating data for this research enquiry and also for the evaluation report commissioned by Creative Partnerships.

The aim was to generate an overall picture of activity from which point more in depth investigation could be undertaken concerning areas of specific interest. The sessional evaluation form was intended for 'everyday' activity taking place in the schools and asked for a short description of the session, indications of what had worked well, indications of any challenges posed by the work and for any subsequent comments or observations.

Completed forms were intended feed into the activity profile forms designed to record blocks of activity or specific projects. The activity profile was designed to consist of information regarding the participants (age, gender, ethnicity, etc), structure of activities (frequency of sessions location and length), the purpose of the activity and

the objectives, the involvement of teaching staff, details of any work produced, degree of participation by learners, and data regarding perceived outcomes and impact of the activity (where the objectives fulfilled? Any changes observed? What evidence is there for this?).

In reality forms were only completed by the two companies/organizations who are the subject of the case studies, selected in part on this basis.

Practitioners cited lack of time as the key barrier to completing the forms, compounded by the difficulty of accessing teaching staff to complete them collaboratively. This is confirmed by my own experience but I might also speculate it suggests an indication of the priority given to evaluating outcomes of production which as indicated in previous chapters is characteristic of organizations charged with the task of creating informal learning opportunities through media production activity.

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

This chapter deals with the presentation and critical interpretation of the research data; based on two case studies looking at the nature and context of practitioner's experiences, and analysis of the findings in relation to the key research aims and objectives relating to relevant theory and critical discussion as outlined in chapters 1-3.

As outlined in the introduction and referred to in chapter 4 I chose to focus on two companies/organisations with contrasting yet comparable experiences of the project both in terms of their own profiles and in relation to the context of their partnering schools. The material presented in the case studies is drawn from transcripts of interviews with three practitioners and, in part, from project evaluation forms completed by the practitioners.

To reiterate the key research aims include:

- *Identifying and exploring the formation of particular discourses, that is, ways of understanding, enacting and experiencing creativity that underpin the rationale of this project.*
- *Furthering understanding of informal sector provision of media production activities and analyzing how prevalent discourses and key philosophies which*

- ground the work may contribute to the development and expectation of creative practice.*
- *Seeking answers to the question what perceived difference does the use of digital media make and how does this influence expectation of creativity?*
 - *Testing the hypothesis that concentrating an analysis of how creativity is defined and informed by particular discourses will indicate that ambiguities arise in the shared understanding between stakeholders in a partnership context such as this pilot project as to the expectations and experience of what creative practice means, or looks like, 'on the ground', from a practitioners perspective.*

Therefore the intention of this chapter is to investigate 1) how practitioners construct and perceive their professional identities, with specific regard to notions of the 'community media' sector and with regard to having an *educational* proviso to try and determine what philosophies and traditions underpin their approach? 2) Factors which characterize practice; what is the degree of emphasis on evaluation vis-à-vis learning objectives, is there an explicit creative imperative relating to pedagogy and what relation does this bear to the perceived affordances of digital technology? 3) to establish the individual school contexts and conditions affecting collaborative work (school ethos and approach, access to equipment, etc) 4) Ultimately to try and assess the basis on which practitioners perceive the expectancy of creative practice using digital media in this context vis-à-vis actual experience (Are there particular discourses of creativity in operation informing perception and actuality?)

I have organized the case studies into distinct sections in order to facilitate a comparative analysis between individual organization/company contexts and practitioners experiences.

Case Studies

Calling The Shots

(CTS⁸ Interviewee: Steve Gear, practitioner and company partner)

Company Profile

Calling The Shots are a digital production company with extensive experience of working to involve individuals and groups in making digital productions such as drama and documentary films, photography and web based projects and offering training and development for 'emerging talent' (www.callingtheshots.co.uk)

CTS have experience of working in school settings but this work constitutes mainly short-term, one-off projects. Their client groups within formal education contexts have typically been pupils within school support units, special schools, and young people disengaged from education, employment and training and adults with learning disabilities.

" We have worked in education before but nothing on this scale or intensity"

Identity, Ethos and Approach

⁸ CTS – Herein an abbreviation for production company Calling The Shots

Steve identified that although the label of 'community' media practitioners sits fairly comfortably with them CTS have a strong production company ethos.

"As a company although we have a commitment to creating opportunities in the media and to nurturing talent and supporting people and creating opportunities for people to gain media skills and to gain and to use media to give voice to their opinions or whatever I think in that sense we do have a more production company ethos than others but I think broadly the community label fits but it's interesting because there's a blurring of those boundaries"

Steve was comfortable with being described as an educationalist but he was clear to distinguish his role and Jeremy's, his partner, from that of the teachers they worked with. Steve asserted that he saw himself primarily as a facilitator which he associated with a community arts mould.

"We're not teachers and that's the difference because certainly we kind of established that quite early on in the school... we did set ourselves up to do something differently, we relate to the children differently, do things outside the classroom as well as inside the classroom"

Suited and Booted Studios

(SB⁹ interviewees Sara Strickland and Chris Kemp, co-founders and directors)

Organisation Profile

Suited and Booted Studios based in Bath, offer digital film and video production services and project based activities. The main strands of the organisation cover community, education and commercial based production and project work including documentation, exhibition and screening events. (www.suitedandbooted.org.uk)

Suited and Booted have done a "fair" amount of work in formal education settings citing five to six large scale yet relatively short term projects, all with secondary schools, typically with an arts and media studies emphasis although from their point of view, none specifically related to the curriculum. A lot of this work has been with kids "at risk of dropping out" of the education system.

⁹ SB – herein an abbreviation for Suited and Booted Studios

"We're not strangers to the school environment but... we've never done anything with anyone younger than about eleven, possibly ten, but certainly not infants" Chris

Identity, Ethos and Approach

"I think the main ethos of our organisation is to create opportunities for, within, the community to develop and understand film and video based media" Sara

Sara and Chris were content to locate the organisation within the 'community media' sector although questioned the latent ambiguity of the term resolving that it appeared to fit "in so much as we work with people to make films who aren't professional film makers". For Suited and Booted the commercial aspect of their work was clearly important and the bridging of the two elements allows an avenue for young people to develop skills and experience in moving image as a career option.

"Part of our ethos is we think it's important working with young people making films, it's important to us that we still do out and out production stuff and the third ethos is to be able to use the commercial production to give young people some experience"

Chris

The idea of being characterised as educationalists was conceptually more problematic for Sara and Chris in that they could recognise educational facets of their work yet the thought of being associated with education provoked an unwanted association with formalism and in turn, a more didactic approach to learning.

"I mean some of what we do is educational, some of what we do is creative but I think that's the one that sits more uneasily and I don't know why" Sara

“There’s an aspect of what we do that’s educational but it ends to be a sort of side product of doing, it’s sort of education through doing, it’s not very often that we would just sit down and talk to people and then not do anything” Chris

Sara made a point worthy of note in relation to the ascription of these labels in that to meet differing funding requirements organisations often have to be flexible with these associations, maybe ticking the education *and/or* community media boxes, despite underlying reticence’s. However, as a matter of individual preference they both aligned themselves with informal education, as Chris remarked, “we’re probably more comfortable with informal education” to which Sara coined the phrase “*informal educationalists*”.

Interpretation & Analysis

Both *Calling The Shots* and *Suited and Booted* indicate that their approach embodies a commitment to democracy and social change in terms of creating opportunities, particularly for communities to access and engage in media production e.g. work with marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Their position reflects an informal sector approach emphasising *participation* and alignment with *facilitation* rather than the didacticism associated with formal *teaching*.

There is also compartmentalising of the terms *community* and *education*, implying that they are perceived as oppositional. Work includes educational *aspects* but any *formal* overtones are displaced with *informal* and explicit actions taken so as to be perceived as *something other than teachers*.

In regard to the term ‘community media’ questions were raised about its’ lack of clarity so too the blurring of boundaries between constitutive areas of their work. Referring to the strands of moving image provision identified in *Being Seen, Being Heard* (BFI/NYA

2002) there were elements of the basic tenets of *community media* that is providing access to the means of production in order to articulate and give voice to groups and individuals, of the principles of *participatory video*.

In terms of theories of learning there is evidence of situated and constructivist activities emphasising vocational learning and 'learning by doing' for personal growth and development, and practical work for self-expression associated with arts education.

The strand of *commercial* production is used as an avenue for developing vocational skills of aspiring practitioners and so the community, educational and commercial strands work interchangeably in the context of variable policy and funding contexts (e.g. amid the backdrop of characteristic piece meal funding for community/informal work resulting in short term project based activity), to further the principle aims of the organizations/companies.

In short, it is possible to detect social/cultural, economic and individual psychological referents in play in terms of the nature and function of providing informal opportunities for engagement in digital media production.

Calling The Shots

School Context

CTS's Blueboard partner school is Teyfant Community School in Hartcliffe, Bristol.

Teyfant is a primary and nursery school for approximately 469 girls and boys with an age range of 3-11¹⁰.

¹⁰ Source: www.ngfl.gov.uk/schoolsites.

Teyfant have a history of involvement with Creative Partnerships and due, largely, to its geographical placement in an area of socio-economic disadvantage is subject to, and/or is able to access, a matrix of initiatives including those with an arts emphasis. In terms of the time spent in school CTS spent on average three 'person' days a week working mainly within a classroom setting, although a couple of the projects took place outside the classroom, with 'The Media Club' taking place after school once a week. CTS worked using digital video, animation techniques and photography on a series of projects spanning work with years 1, 4, 5 & 6 pupils. Whilst working within a classroom context CTS made a point of involving every class member.

Suited and Booted Studios

School Context

Suited and Booted spent their residency working with Air Balloon Infants School, in St. George, Bristol. Air Balloon provides schooling for approximately 267 girls and boys aged between five and seven years¹¹.

Air Balloon Infants have been involved with Creative Partnerships since early on in the life of the initiative and have embraced subsequent opportunities offered to them through the scheme. Suited and Booted identify the school's approach to education as extremely "holistic", open to experimentation and placing a high degree of value on the role of arts activity for all children within the school. Geographically, the school nestles in an area where funding schemes such as Education Action Zone's do not extend yet the area is not especially prosperous and the number of pupils relatively small.

¹¹ Source: www.ngfl.gov.uk/schoolsites.

Their ethos is very much that their job with these kids that they have is to give them as many different experiences as possible and I think they do what they can to make that happen... There's almost always something going on, a lot of outside people come in, there's a lot of dance stuff and sports stuff... a lot of the time it isn't the standard curriculum classroom kind of stuff. Chris

Suited and Booted spent an average of 3 person days a week in the school.

Sara and Chris worked using a range of digital media equipment and techniques, such as enabling children to take pictures with digital stills cameras, basic video filming and editing and making short animation films. Suited and Booted were faced with the challenge of working with all the children in the school at some point during the year in response to the school's ethos and expectation that all the children should have an opportunity to try new experiences.

Interpretation & Analysis

Although both schools have a history of substantial involvement with Creative Partnerships Teyfant Primary (CTS partner school) currently have access to a wider range of external arts initiatives.

Air Balloon School, have a strong holistic persuasion (more common in infant settings) emphasising the role of the arts in personal development and growth (accentuating an individual psychological function, furthermore early years settings characteristically emphasise the value of play and room for experimentation) and adhere less strictly to the curriculum. They emphasise providing *access* to different experiences for *all* children, equally CTS were intent on working *democratically* with all children in whole class settings.

The notion of 'cultural capital' (Buckingham et al, 1999) concerns the idea that *increasing access alone*, to digital technologies for the purposes of production does

not equate to an automatic increase in learner's creativity. Learner's capacity for creative use of digital technologies is related to cultural competency that is to say prior knowledge of the creative possibilities that technologies afford *and* proficiency in technical skills needed to operate the equipment. Therefore, opportunities should be provided for both recurrent *and* recursive opportunities to engage in media production activity. For it is argued proficiency in terms of technical skills and awareness of possibility leads to an increased ability of students to consider how the technology might be used creatively.

This suggests a potential contradiction in pursuing a purely democratic approach which emphasises access alone, to providing opportunities for media production, in that in the process of striving for *quantity* of opportunity, *quality* of opportunity may be in danger of compromise.

Calling The Shots

Proficiency, awareness and expectation

CTS conducted an initial media skills survey of staff gauging levels of confidence and experience in relation to using digital cameras for photography and video and for storing and editing material. Of those who responded a low level of confidence and experience was indicated in using video cameras and video editing

Publicly screening students production work functioned to raise awareness among teaching staff, pupils and parents of the residency and served to indicate the potential of engaging in digital media production.

We'd set up a regular Tuesday lunchtime where we'd try and produce a DVD every week of new work or sometimes it was work in progress and we took these in and showed these in the dining hall at lunchtime and that was great actually. I think that was one of the

key things in terms of raising our profile. The kids were talking about what they'd seen and staff would poke their heads in and the head, Gus was suddenly really enthused and that motivated him to get this presenter that shows work in the reception, in the school foyer so parents, pupils arrive in the morning and there's this DVD and they've got his bank now, there's probably nine, ten of these DVD's that we produced and they show these regularly and rotate them

Practical engagement with using digital media in the classroom on a whole class basis within the primary school clearly illustrated for CTS the parameters of what is achievable given time, expertise and resources available to teachers.

I think we went in with high expectations of what we'd be able to do... The animation work that we've done has been really fun, they've been really engaged but I don't foresee teachers taking that on and doing it because it only worked because the teacher had the rest of the class and I could work with a small group... I can't see the teacher taking on that role and leaving the rest of the class to an LSA, unless an LSA had those skills.

Really if every teacher was using a digital camera, was loading them into their computer, could turn them all the right way around, put them in a file and know where to find them again and put a slideshow together then that would really feel like we'd made an impact on the school and that's not rocket science either and we haven't done that

Suited and Booted Studios

Proficiency, awareness and expectation

Suited and Booted provided a total of twenty sessions over the course of the year providing digital media training for teachers.

I think we thought that we could revolutionise the school and we'll have everyone working on their whiteboards and deedly-dee and this, that and the other, and digitally revolutionise the school and we will leave and it will be the shining beacon of everyone making films right, left and centre and it's not like that really! It's quite slow. Sara

Initial expectations about the levels of proficiency they would be able to foster in teachers proved unrealistic. In reality, progress was slower and activities simplified to address actual need.

What's way out from our point of view is not essentially the teacher's point of view. The fact that we were giving reception proper cameras to go out and take pictures with was pretty way out for them clearly. Chris

With the teachers, it's not just about going in and teaching them... it's so they understand the point and value to what we're doing. Chris

Practitioners working with children in the classrooms enabled teachers to observe production activities and SB felt it raised the teacher's confidence in the children's ability to handle and use the equipment.

Even though we'd be in the corner of the classroom it felt much more holistic, that even if they weren't taking a lot of time to see us working or coming over, they're obviously really aware of what's going on in their classrooms... I think it also gave them the confidence that if they gave the kids a camera it wasn't just gonna end up in a big pile on the floor. Sara

Children have been very responsive to using the cameras and have surprised us with the confidence and care whilst working with the cameras. Teacher

Interpretation and Analysis

In this instance, low levels of proficiency or competency relate to teacher confidence in teaching with the tools of digital technology, which in turn impacts on the possibility of creating opportunities for pupils to engage in creative production work. Moreover teacher expectancy about the value and function of digital media production for creative work relates to an awareness of the possibilities that the technology can afford.

The practitioner's expectations of the level of proficiency which teachers could develop in using digital media during the residency were unrealistic and not just related to the quantity of training sessions provided but also to an understanding of potential application and purpose. This serves to underline the double pronged approach which is required to foster creative use of the technologies for production work.

Calling The Shots

The Potential of Digital Media

I think right from the start we saw an opportunity to experiment with different kinds of practise and we'd never worked in animation before and it was one of those things that really excited me, as a practitioner but equally the kids and staff, because you can come up with anything at all, you're not limited by what you can go and film

Description of Year 1 Animation Project:

Whole class working with practitioner in standard class groups over a period of 6 weeks, one afternoon a week. The aim was to devise and create a story using '1-stop motion' using 2D and 3D animation techniques.

Objectives included: Group work skills, story telling, drawing backgrounds to cut out, digital camera and computer skills, understanding the process of animation, using a digital video camera, recording voice-overs and acting out character voices.

The activity aimed to link with specific curriculum areas relating to literacy, speaking and listening.

Children's level of participation: children devised story, learned camera skills and operated camera and computer. Pupils moved animation characters and filmed live action sequences. Pupils acted character voices.

Final film edited by CTS and three minute DVD produced, distributed to children and publicly screened in school.

(Source: CTS Activity Evaluation Profile Form)

I think an appropriate pack of resources for the school would be a flight case with ten digital cameras and two or three computers that the kids can get their hands on to load images on and that would be such a step forward really. That's where you'd really have an impact, you know, you could integrate it into everything they'd be doing in the classroom.

Suited and Booted Studios

The Potential of Digital Media

The thought that how young it is they can cope a) with the cameras and the whole concept of it, it's got nothing to do with how old they are, so I could work with seventeen, eighteen year olds and they get it as little as some of the four year olds get it... a lot of film making when you stop and break it down is really repetitive movement that can be learnt and so when you stop and break it down for the little ones they really get that just as easily... it's something I'd like to do more of Sara

Description of Film making and editing with year two –

Sara spent three to four days working with the class to create a 'memory' video representing the children's experience of their school life. The teacher helped to plan and draw out the ideas from the children, after which they worked in small groups using a digital video camera to film their peers and edit their own clips. The footage was edited together by Sara to produce two versions, one short and one long, screened at the children's leaving assembly, viewed by parents. The children received an individual copy on DVD.

(Source: SB Activity Evaluation Profile/Sessional Capture Form)

Interpretation and Analysis

The information above points to some of the affordances of digital technology such as provisionality, range, interactivity, convergence (e.g. merging digital video and audio) and distribution (e.g. students taking home DVD's of their production work). However, the technology does not itself 'deliver' creativity.

This relies on the educators proficiency (in using the medium) and the awareness of creative possibilities of the medium in order to foster learning conditions which, according to the definition by NACCCE in *All Our Futures* (1999) stimulates imaginative, purposeful, productive and original activity which is of value.

The ability to deliver such an objective must necessarily involve development of a creative *imperative* which informs pedagogy and approach to creating learning opportunities and which is based on an understanding of the nature, value and function of creativity itself.

Calling The Shots

The Paradox of Creativity

The overtly *creative* dimension of the initiative appeared to function paradoxically for CTS. On the one hand, the lack of prescriptive expectations about the outcomes of the residency other than to seek to develop the creative use of digital media in schools, gave them scope and perceived freedom to experiment with different kinds of practice, Conversely this operated as a pressure when they were having difficulty getting things off the ground with the school in that given the slow progress of trying to forge a positive relationship with the school and the time constraints CTS felt that it

may have been beneficial to have established a clear structure with the school at the beginning of the year indicating specific aims and objectives for the residency period.

Suited and Booted Studios

The Paradox of Creativity

If there isn't that prescriptive boundary... I give myself my own boundaries and then within that I know I can push out those boundaries because they're my own self-imposed ones... and then every so often you have a bit of a wobble of like 'Oh my god! It's not working, what's going on? But then the main worry is 'Oh my god, I'm not being experimental enough... I'm not being whacky enough for Creative Partnerships I should be doing something really out to lunch. Sara

Being thrown in at the deep end with infants we had to completely rethink it and that was quite scary but I think most of what we'd planned did work and it made us much more creative in how we approached it actually and there's lots of stuff we've done that I didn't expect we would have done.. Sara

Interpretation and Analysis

The explicit *creative* remit of the pilot project functioned paradoxically affecting the practitioner's expectations and, in turn, experiences of their engagement in partnership work of this nature.

Creative practice, here, is perceived as being governed by a lack of prescription about the objectives for creative work and therefore in being afforded freedom to experiment and take risks (constituents identified in prevailing discourses of creativity).

This afforded particular benefits such as being able to develop new professional practices. Conversely it also induced feelings of uncertainty and a lack of confidence

because of ambiguity regarding what was expected of them (such as the *level* of creativity or 'whacky-ness' demonstrated in their professional practice).

To conclude, the crux of the matter it appears is that expectation of what constitutes creative activity with digital media shapes the ability of practitioners to develop a creative imperative informing their practice. If expectations of what constitutes creativity are unclear then, so too are pedagogy and the ability to support participants learning. (E.g. reflecting the findings of the Becta report, 2003 by Reid et al; regarding the use of digital video in schools which stated "there was evidence that some teachers appeared to operate with a model that equated creativity with originality and freedom from constraint. This in turn implied that the teacher had no clear role in supporting pupils' creative processes": section 3.3)

Of course, there are other factors which impinge on the ability to develop conditions suitable for fostering creative learning in this partnership context such as gaining *appropriate access to appropriate equipment*, having the capacity to build supportive relationships with teaching staff, in particular with senior school management and time with teachers to plan and evaluate.

This latter point is crucial. Evaluation of informal sector approaches to provision of opportunities for media production have shown the lack of emphasis on setting learning objectives and developing a framework with which to evaluate the efficacy of production activity. Collaborating with schools is seen to offer possibilities for pedagogic change whereby community practitioners would be compelled to make the objectives of creative activity explicit. In practice, although the practitioners who were interviewed actively welcomed the potential to develop objectives by planning

and subsequently evaluating with teachers, they found it extremely difficult to gain access to this opportunity.

The following chapter will draw all strands of this analysis together, presenting conclusions to this research along with a series of recommendations arising from the research process.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The analytical process of research indicates:

- The formation of prevailing discourses of creativity which underpin the rationale for the project is complex, contradictory and constantly in flux and operates dialectically with prevailing educational discourses.
- Practitioner's involved in the provision of opportunities for digital media production within the informal sector are motivated by varying imperatives (e.g. social, democratic, cultural, economic and individual, psychological) and

demonstrate different practices and approaches to learning (e.g. situated/vocational, learning by doing for personal development, practical work as self expression, etc) drawing on different traditions and philosophies (such as '*community media*': giving voice to community groups and '*participatory video*', based on the strands of provision identified by NYA/BFI 2002) all of which can lead to ambiguity in the process of professional identification, particularly surrounding the notion of what constitutes the commonly used umbrella term *community media* (at the crux of which is uncertainty of the connotations of the reference to *community*).

This is compounded by changing policy and funding contexts to which they must adapt resulting in blurring of boundaries and cross platform work encompassing elements of community, education and commercial production. Therefore, practitioners display a degree of ambivalence in relation to traditional binaries of informal/formal education, of teaching/facilitation, although as a preference will adopt terminology to describe their work which implies an equal partnership in the learning process, reflecting their overriding ethos and which tends to avoid referents to the perceived didacticism of approaches to formal education.

- Digital technologies provide specific affordances to learners conducive to fostering creativity but do not themselves 'deliver' creativity. Moreover this requires: the proficiency of the educator or facilitator with an awareness of the creative potential of the medium, combined with an understanding of

creativity and the conditions required for development (including the notion of *cultural capital*; access to recurrent and reflexive opportunities to engage in production develops competency and awareness of possibility).

- Particular rhetorics of creativity form a spectrum of discourse which inform the ethos of *Creative Partnerships* such as social/cultural, economic and cognitive (individual, psychological) imperatives. For example, the *social*/significance of *creative* community and arts organizations working in partnerships with schools to foster creativity (recommended by the NACCCE report *All Our Futures* 1999).
- The sliding scale of discourse relating to creativity which surrounds partnership work in this context served to elicit confusion as to the expectancy of creativity, resulting in this case, in a paradox, in terms of the experience of practitioners working on the ground (also taking into account individual school contexts). For example, the equating of creativity with freedom functioned to operate paradoxically in that on the one hand practitioners perceived this allowed them space and opportunity to take risks and experiment leading to the development of new forms of practice. Whereas on the other hand, this amounted to feelings of self doubt (in light of this sense of freedom, the question was posed, are we as practitioners being creative enough?).
- As such, research has confirmed the hypothesis that concentrating an analysis of how creativity is defined and informed by particular discourses will indicate

that ambiguities arise in the shared understanding between stakeholders in a partnership context such as this pilot project as to the expectations and experience of what creative practice means, or looks like, 'on the ground', from a practitioners perspective. If this is so, the development of explicit creative imperatives and objectives for supporting learning and informing pedagogy will be inhibited (and, so too, the opportunities for developing an evaluative framework to determine the efficacy of this work, precisely what those working in an informal educational capacity have been charged with historic neglect of).

Recommendations

- These findings support the call for the development of a matrix of "clearly described rhetorics and clearly described stakeholder positions, contexts and interest" in order that those involved in delivery of projects such as Blueboard can become "much more precise about what exactly they mean by creativity, what traditions they are working in, and how this will translate into the learning experience" (Burn 2005).
- A number of issues have been raised in considering the work of media practitioners operating in the traditions of informal education. In particular, concerning understandings of what constitutes *community media* as a specific domain of practice and perceptions and definitions relating to the nature and

purpose of *media education*. Therefore, I recommend further research to address these concerns.

- The purpose of this research has been to explore expectancy of creativity and digital media from a practitioner's perspective and therefore I would suggest that future research, in this context, could be instigated in order to investigate the perceptions and experience of creativity from the perspective of teachers and students.

The driving force underlying this research has been my desire as a practitioner to engage in a process of reflection, using consequent insights to develop my professional practice which may also help to inform change and the professional development of other practitioners. Engaging in the research process has served to maintain and heighten this desire and strengthen my commitment to making future contributions to an emergent field of critical enquiry.

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