

"Everyone can imagine their own Gellert": the democratic artist and 'inclusion' in primary and nursery classrooms

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Abstract:

What do artists do when they work in schools? Can teachers do the same? These were the questions at the heart of our recent research, investigating the work of twelve artists working in primary and secondary schools in England. Funded by Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE) as a 'legacy' project of Creative Partnerships (2003-2011) our intention was to develop a theorization of artists' practice that could inform the work that teachers do. In this paper we report on a key aspect of the Signature Pedagogies project ([URL](http://www.signaturepedagogies.org.uk)) the way in which artists approached the issue of inclusion. Through an examination of the work of three story-makers in primary and nursery schools, documented through observation, film and interview, we show that the democratic participatory practices they adopted were based in a fundamental belief that: every child was capable of having ideas; every child could contribute meaningfully to discussions; and every child was integral to a collective 'performance'. We conclude that these artists' democratic orientations may well be difficult for teachers to adopt in the current moment, but that this artistic work in schools may still provide a welcome relief for all involved, as well as maintaining an exemplar of alternative pedagogical practice that might be expanded in a changed policy environment.

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Inclusion has been a key policy concern in the United Kingdom and elsewhere for well over two decades. Sometimes understood narrowly as the integration of children with special needs in regular schools, inclusion is now more generally understood as policies and practices which cater for children with diverse and different interests, needs, knowledges, values, languages, capacities and family contexts (Ainscow 1999). The rub is whether inclusion is understood as the adaptation of children to forms of schooling which have typically served some better than others, or whether it is about changing schooling itself (Slee 2011).

In this paper we take the latter stance. Our interest is in practices and pedagogies that allow all children, regardless of who they are, where they were born and their apparent physical, cognitive and emotional capabilities, to participate in and benefit from their school experiences. We understand this to mean that schools and teachers must develop, extend and challenge all children, refusing to accept that any of them are incapable of achieving the highest levels of learning. In order to do this, schools and teachers may choose to work with skillful adult partners who possess complementary expertise. Sometimes these partners are artists.

Here, we examine one example of such a partnership approach; we look at three story-makers who worked with primary and nursery teachers to support classroom change. We offer three short case studies of these artists at work, and then discuss the aspects of their pedagogical approach which were key to inclusion – a rich combination of inclusive axiological principles and decentred epistemology, enacted through a repertoire of democratic creative practices. We suggest that, despite current policy preferences for more narrow approaches to teaching and learning, partnering with artists has a valuable place in the early and middle years of schooling.

We begin by introducing our research project and the three story-makers.

### **The Signature Pedagogies project**

Our research was funded by Creative Partnerships. Creative Partnerships (CP) was the most ambitious, biggest and longest running arts and education intervention in the world. CP aimed to transform students' experiences of schooling, expand teachers' classroom approaches and dramatically improve the ways in which schools functioned and performed through its focus on 'creative learning' and whole school change. CP operated in England from 2002-2011 and worked intensively with over 5,000 schools, 90,000 teachers and over 1 million young people. Through its 25 regional delivery organisations, it touched 1 in 4 schools in the country, from nurseries and Pupil Referral Units to sixth form colleges. It supported 55 national schools of creativity, and some 1500 change schools, all of which exhibited exemplary creative learning practices. Over 6,500 national arts and creativity organisations were involved in CP.

Our project was an investigation of the **signature pedagogies** of creative practitioners in schools. The idea of signature pedagogies comes from research

which explores how differing disciplines in universities educate doctoral students (Golde 2007; Guring *et al.* 2009; Shulman 2005). Researchers found that there were some common pedagogical approaches across clusters of disciplines, but there were also distinctive practices, such as the field trip in geography and studio practice in architecture. We would add to these specific arts based examples – for example, the workshop in creative writing, the studio ‘crit’ in contemporary art, the vocal warm-up in singing and so on. These distinctive practices are intended to do more than inculcate knowledge, they also set out deliberately to teach ‘habits of mind’, the ways of *thinking* about geography/architecture, *doing* geography/architecture and *being* a geographer/architect. They induct students into a ‘profession’ and its traditions, conventions and mores. We came to see, on the basis of our cumulative findings about creative practice (e.g. Christine Hall and Thomson 2005; 2007; Christine Hall *et al.* 2007; Thomson and Hall 2008; 2011; Thomson *et al.* 2010a; Thomson *et al.* 2010b; Thomson *et al.* 2006; 2007; Thomson *et al.* 2009), that there was something as distinctive about creative pedagogies as a handwritten signature.

Signature pedagogies are both **epistemological** – that is they deal with things that we have to know and know how to do – and **ontological** – that is they are about the way we are in the world and the ways in which we orient ourselves to being and making meaning in the world. The creative practitioners we have observed also have a particular **axiological** commitment – that is they value collaborative and cooperative ways of working. This is integral to their pedagogical approaches. Each of these elements cannot be separated out in practice, even though we might write about them separately in order to advance our understandings. The epistemological/ontological/axiological combination becomes a kind of ‘indwelling’ (Polanyi 1966), a tacit knowledge, which is conveyed as much through the presence of the practitioner and through the way that they orient themselves to questions and tasks, as it is about what they actually say and do. The combination of knowing, doing and being that are found in signature pedagogies is not separable into distinctive chunks which can be planned for, and learned/taught separately. Both epistemological and ontological learnings progress together, at the same time, and through one pedagogical practice, as we will show.

## Research design and process

The Signature Pedagogies project used observation and interview to develop rich descriptions of creative practice. This is perhaps best described as ethnographic in intent because the time period available for observation, and in some cases, the period in which the creative practitioner was in the school, did not allow for very lengthy engagement. However in several cases we had observed the creative practitioners at work before, and over several projects. This is the case with the three story-makers discussed here.

Observation was conducted in two ways: first through researcher visits in which detailed field notes were kept; secondly, by filming two days when creative practitioners were working with students. Filming allowed us to watch sessions

repeatedly and was particularly good for capturing a range of non-verbal interactions which were more difficult to record in conventional field notes. Filming also allowed us to watch each other's field visits. Creative practitioners were interviewed both formally and informally. Further interviews occurred at a second stage, the construction of a website where key elements of signature pedagogies have been illustrated and explained ([www.signaturepedagogies.org.uk](http://www.signaturepedagogies.org.uk)).

We selected schools on the basis of their involvement in the CP-supported 'Schools of Creativity' network, assuming that in this way we would capture experiences of working with artists that were already embedded in the school. In all, twelve sites were observed, six primary and six secondary. The primary locations were all in the Midlands while the secondary were in and around London and the south of England. In primary schools we observed three story-makers, one storyteller, one dancer and one visual and movement artist. In the secondary schools, we observed work on radio, physical theatre, visual art, dance, media and creative activities such as problem-solving.

Drawing on our previous research (e.g. Thomson *et al.* 2009), we developed a common analytic framework which focused on: resources, classroom discourse, flow, use of space, behaviour management, teaching methods and framing. The resulting analysis provided us with a conceptual toolkit to identify the specific characteristics of the pedagogies developed by artists, to suggest ways in which they differed from pedagogies of the mainstream, and to make claims for their educational value.

In this paper we report on three of these artists: Terina, John and Mark. All of the artists volunteered to be part of the Signature Pedagogies project knowing that they would be filmed, and excerpts of the film used on a public website. They knew that they would be recognisable. They also chose to be known by their own names.

### **The story-makers**

We refer to these three artists as story-makers, not storytellers (see fig 1 for further information about them). Although they sometimes did work with stories written by others, their artistic practice was primarily the development of original narratives. These were invented for and with a specific group at a particular time and for a particular purpose. In each of our three cases, writing an original story involved the active participation of children and varying degrees of improvisation.

**Terina** worked with a feminist theatre company which specialised in productions built from interviews with ordinary people. She had over twenty years experience in theatre in education projects and had a Masters degree in a theatre related area. She was employed in a primary school to work on a twelve-week project with a Year 5 class (10-11 year olds), primarily white working class children. The project involved interviewing four members of the school community and turning their stories of 'ordinary courage' into short plays. These were performed for parents.

**John** worked one day a week as a story-maker-in-residence in a highly ethnically diverse nursery (4 year olds). He typically worked with one group for a term, taking them for a one to one and a half hour session on one morning in the week. Each session produced an improvised story. In the afternoon John would publish the story as a laminated text available for parents to see that afternoon, and for the group to revisit the next morning as part of their literacy activities. John had a degree in visual art and worked in community theatre and pantomime.

**Mark** worked for one day a week as a story-maker in a predominantly white working class primary school (5-7 year olds). He worked with one class for the entire morning and another for the afternoon. Each class produced an improvised story each session, although there were also some ongoing activities - puppetry and film-making for example. Mark had a further education qualification in performing arts, ran workshops in clowning and also worked in local heritage and community theatre.

Fig 1: The story-makers.

We now present three snapshots of each story-maker at work. Each snapshot is discussed to illustrate one the criteria we suggested in the introduction to this paper: (1) inclusive axiology, (2) decentred epistemologies, and (3) democratic creative practices.

### **Snapshot One: Terina encourages everyone to be involved**

When Year 5 arrived at school in the morning they were greeted by small green shoe-prints in the passage, a scattering of green leaves on the walls and the green words Once, Upon and Time randomly pinned on boards and walls. It was not clear who had left the prints, leaves and words nor what they meant. However, school seemed to start normally. Year 5 went into their classroom, sat on the carpeted area at the front of the room and the register was called as usual. Then, from outside the door they heard singing "Can you hear me? If you hear me, give a cough quite loudly". Story Lady then entered the room, larger than life in bright lime green. She invited the children to follow her to the library, again sit on the carpet and listen to a story. She pulled a stained manuscript from a voluminous lime green bag and read.

Story Lady presented to the inner city and racially diverse class a traditional Welsh legend. Gellert, a brave dog, foils a wolf attempting to steal and eat his master's newborn baby. When the master returns home he sees signs of a struggle, assumes that Gellert has attacked the baby and kills the valiant and badly injured dog. When he realises what has happened, the master is devastated.

Throughout the reading, Story Lady interrupted the narrative to ask the children to imagine and tell her details of the events - the colour of the curtains in the room, how the baby looks and sounds as it is sleeping, Gellert's breed and appearance, the sound of the fight between the dog and the wolf, the noise Gellert's master made when he saw signs of a struggle in the room. These questions produced enthusiastic

responses with each child anxious to tell Story Lady their particular imagining. Hands punched at the air in order to gain attention, some children called out what they had envisaged. Terina used the story to introduce the idea of everyday courage and she stage-managed an equally enthusiastic conversation about who the children knew who were brave and under what circumstances this courage was exhibited in ordinary life.

An experienced practitioner, Terina was able to ensure that everyone who wanted to speak was able to do so, while at the same time making sure that the class didn't collapse into noisy chaos, and that Story Lady never had to assume a teacherly tone and a threatened consequence. However, later in the staff room, the class teacher began to apologise to Terina for the class's ill-mannered behaviour. She expressed some concern about some of the 'silly ideas' that the children offered. One child had said Gellert was a dachshund, and another a Jack Russell. The teacher noted that these ideas were clearly ridiculous. Terina listened, and then carefully responded to the implicit criticism of the discussion process she had been using.

"Everyone can imagine their own Gellert," she said. "It's important that each child can connect their lives to the story they are being told. Having pictures in your mind of what is happening is the way I allowed them to enter into the story in their own way. Everyone's Gellert is different, no-one's Gellert is wrong."

Terina was most concerned to point out that no child's suggestion had either been rejected or deemed correct, while also implying that this was a process which the teacher might also adopt.

### *Inclusive axiology*

The snapshot of Terina working as Story Lady exemplifies a particular axiological position that was consistent across all of the artists in the Signature Pedagogies study. Axiology, in the context of artists working with children, is understood as a terrain which joins ethics and aesthetics together. Axiology is fundamentally concerned with values, as opposed to knowledge (epistemology) (Pring 2000), connecting questions of what is right and good with those of value and beauty (Winston 2008).

The artists we observed approached the work that they did with children from a particular values position, namely:

- *All children have ideas and imaginings and all of these are of equal value. Any of them might produce something worthy and pleasing. No-one's idea or imagining is foolish or ill-informed.*

Terina explained to the classroom teacher that every child had a picture of Gellert in their mind. This picture was clearly limited by their experience of dogs, but this didn't matter. Terina's questioning was to encourage the children to imagine the dog and the scene and thus insert themselves into the story so that it became alive

for them. Her goal was not to produce an historically accurate rendition of the legend, but to focus on the moral of the story. Terina wanted an engaged discussion about everyday courage grounded in the children's lives; imagining details of the story was a first step.

Rather than see that some children had special needs that had to be taken into account and therefore that teaching approaches had to be adjusted for them in some way (usually via reduction of difficulty), Terina, like other artists we saw, began with the view that all children and young people were capable of having ideas, making meanings, and participating (cf. the argument made by Ranciere 2004 about assuming universal capability, not incapability, as the starting point).

- *All children can participate and all should be encouraged to do so.*

Terina allowed the discussion about various aspects of the Gellert story to persist until all children who wanted to say something had spoken. This was somewhat longer than the average teacher following conventional lesson planning advice would allow a group discussion to carry on. She encouraged children to listen respectfully to all ideas and, as Story Lady, responded affirmatively to every contribution.

All of the artists we observed took this view. If they saw that some children were not involved, then they generally encouraged and persisted, rather than change what they were doing. Because the pedagogies which they used were open-ended and because they made explicit that there would be a range of ways in which children could participate, we often recorded practitioners explaining that: nothing was either right or wrong; that there was no one way better than another; that doing the very best that you could was all that was required. This invitation offered every student the opportunity to act in ways that felt comfortable. The high expectations of practitioners were usually met, and this was often to the surprise of teachers who commented on the ways in which creative pedagogies allowed students who appeared to struggle in other aspects of school to do surprising things.

### **Snapshot Two: John and the children look at their neighbourhood**

After morning milk and fruit fourteen four year olds gathered eagerly with their teacher and teaching assistant at the door of the nursery. John soon joined them, instructing them to walk hand in hand following in his footsteps. "It's a surprise" he said, winking and smiling. The children walked two blocks away from the security of the nursery, passed through iron gates and stood looking up at a tall building. It was much higher than the blocks of council flats in which most of them live. "Who knows what this building is?" John asked and heads were shaken all round. None of the children had been to this particular building although most of them knew it and walked past it regularly. "It's where students from the university live," he tells them, "and we're going to go to the very top of the building so we can get a look at our community."

Three trips in the lift later and everyone was packed in the stair well on the sixteenth floor. John pointed out the nursery and invited the children to indicate the local landmarks that they could see. Eagerly craning to spot familiar locations, the children talked over each other, keen to show their peers where they lived, the shops that they used, where their friends and family lived and the churches and mosque that they attended. John pointed to the park where they regularly went on nursery excursions and asked the children to remember what they had done there.

A babble of memories... then one of the children remembered seeing a bat one evening when she was in the park with her family. This was the cue that John had been waiting for. He always listened carefully and waited for a moment when a child spoke of an event, character or place that might form the nexus of a story. John asked the children what the bat looked like, why it was in the park and what had happened to it to make it come out by itself in the light. The story making began in earnest. John solicited lots of ideas from the children, connected them to various key points in the landscape that they had previously indicated and negotiated with them about details of the emerging plot. "When we see it, would the bat have been chasing a cat or looking for food?" John's improvised story joined together the pieces of information that the children provided to produce a hilarious romp that inevitably included John being bitten by the bat and rescued by the children.

### *Decentred epistemology*

The snapshot of John improvising a story exemplifies a pattern we saw across the artists in the Signature Pedagogies project, namely the soliciting of knowledges from the class. We use the term epistemology here because we want to suggest that the artists deliberately understood story-making as a process which both used and produced knowledge. They had, often semi-implicitly (see Polanyi 1966 on tacit dimensions of knowledge), a theory of the kind of knowledge production and reproduction which they were leading.

The axiological position held by the artists was congruent with an epistemological position in which:

- *All knowledges are equal. No one knowledge is superior to another.*

John did not live in the neighbourhood where the nursery was located. While he knew some of the local landmarks he did not know all of them. Each of the children had some knowledge of the area, and while some of this was shared, each had their own particular lived experience of place. He could have approached the top of the building story-making session with a map of the community, or with his own interpretation of it. He didn't do this, and instead asked the children to offer their versions of their community.

While this might seem an un-contentious approach, as a practice it stands in some contrast to the norm in English education. Children are most commonly seen as 'tabula rasa' needing to be filled with school knowledges. That knowledge is



generally taken for granted but is actually very often highly classed, gendered and raced (e.g. Apple 1993; Slee 2011; Young 1998). Children who are advantaged by already being in possession of these school knowledges are thus further advantaged in their education. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977; 1979) called this the educational reproduction of dominant linguistic and cultural capital. They argued that educational equity requires pedagogical strategies that seek to de-centre dominant ways of knowing and dominant knowledge production practices.

All of the artists we saw took this view. They saw themselves as contributors with expertise in particular processes, in this instance storymaking, and their job as facilitating ways in which all children could participate. A key to this was to elicit children's individual understandings, languages, truths, and narratives.

- *Knowledges can be shared without any one of them dominating*

John's opening story-making sequence allowed children to bring their knowledge about their community to their peers and to the nursery staff to form a shared, personalised and enlarged understanding of the area. Their joint contributions produced a more comprehensive picture of the local neighbourhood than anyone of them, including John, could have produced.

John's approach to knowledge was inclusive. It was however not unique. Educational researchers have long argued for pedagogies and interventions which seek out, value and use the knowledges that are less commonly valued in classrooms. Pedagogic concepts such as 'virtual school bags' (Thomson 2002), 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzales *et al.* 2005; Kathy Hall *et al.* 2013), 'texts of our lives' (Fecho 2011) and 'place based education' (Gruenewald and Smith 2008) all seek to decentre an homogenous view of knowledge and to propose pedagogic strategies through which students' understandings can be made visible, while also being connected to the knowledge which counts in exams and tests. John's approach, undertaken with young children in an arts-based practice, suggests how this decentering can be achieved.

### **Snapshot Three: Mark builds a group story**

Mark's story-making occurs in the drama room, a large carpeted space with a few chairs scattered about. There is a work table and several small tray storage units containing a wide range of materials - coloured paper, pens, scissors, card, straws, sticks and recycled material such as egg cartons. Mark has worked with the class for some time and, as it is a multi-grade group of Reception, Year One and Two, he has worked with some children over three years. He has an established routine and the older children know the pattern of story-making lessons very well.

Mark begins with a warm-up in which both bodies and voices are required. Percussive rhythms and nonsense phrases feature heavily. He then introduces the theme for the half-day session. He asks the children to sit down in a circle and he sits in a chair he has situated behind him. He produces a folded white handkerchief from

his pocket, swirls it in the air to release it and then pulls it along the bias to form a long strip. He ties a knot in the middle. He pauses to look at the children who are watching silently, expectantly. Mark then lifts the handkerchief with two hands, holding each side of the knot so that he forms a shape that could be taken as a head and legs. He begins to move the legs around, and the handkerchief becomes a creature which can walk, hop, limp and jump. He introduces small noises as the creature moves. Sometimes it is appealing, at others funny, at one point it transforms into something menacing. After a few minutes the children are also moving, craning forward, some reaching out their hands, some moving their hands to manipulate an imaginary handkerchief creature of their own. They clearly want to do this themselves.

Mark distributes pieces of cloth and divides the children into groups of six and seven. Each group works with an adult. The class teacher, two teaching assistants and Mark are seated on chairs with groups of children who are instructed to make their cloth into a character with distinctive movements, noises and a back story. These are shared within the group. After half an hour of energetic discussion and showing/telling, Mark re-gathers the class into a large circle. Each group briefly presents their puppets to the whole group. Children are encouraged to stand up and speak up with their puppet – to perform with it, to present their invention.

During these presentations, as with Terina's group sessions, Mark is careful to acknowledge and respond positively to every child. The bell rings for morning break and the class exit knowing that afterwards they will return to a similar pattern of activity – whole class discussion, small group work, and then the composition of a whole class collective story made from the four groups' separate collaborations. The collective class story is always authored through an active process in which children are able to act out, in this case with their puppets, as well as speak the narrative they have been engaged in constructing.

### *Democratic creative practices*

Like the work by Terina and John, Mark's practice was underpinned by an inclusive axiology and a decentred epistemology. His approach to each story-making session provided a structure and process through which these were enacted. We argue that his approach, like that of other artists that we saw, was democratic. The key to this was that Mark ensured that:

- *All children can take action, participate and negotiate.*

Mark orchestrated events when the whole class worked together. He introduced a theme, and led warm-up and cool-down activities, but after this his role became much more about negotiation. Like John and Terina, he solicited children's ideas and understandings and provided stage management sufficient to allow group stories to be brought together in one culminating performance. In the small group work Mark, teachers and teaching assistants were group facilitators and secretaries whose job was to ensure that all children had the opportunity to put their ideas

forward.

Knight (2001) suggests that a democratic classroom has several key characteristics including:

- a democratic authority within which the teacher is persuasive but always prepared to negotiate.
- a centripetal orientation, that is, the teacher seeks to include rather than exclude, by pulling all students into the centre
- a rights basis: it embraces the right to free expression, privacy, due process, and of movement; participatory decision-making is the norm.
- an optimum environment for learning in which students can do the following: take risks; endure no unnecessary pain; make meaning; develop a sense of competence, belonging, and usefulness; experience hope, excitement, and ownership; and work creatively.

Knight argues that these things require an integration of conversation, more conventional academic activities, student-led research, and action.

Wood (1998) takes democratic education in a similar direction. He proposes that, in addition to a democratic process in which students are engaged in making decisions in the classroom (p. 191), a curriculum for democratic engagement is also necessary. He suggests that such a curriculum always focuses on critical literacy, which gives students “personal and political facility with language,” enabling them to “evaluate what is read and heard” and to name and construct models of “preferred social life” (p. 189). This approach uses students’ own histories, lives, and surroundings to enhance their cultural awareness and build cultural capital (p. 190), as well as promoting democratic values, in which students both debate and experience equality and community (p. 94).

We contend that many of these elements can be seen in Mark’s overall session strategy. During story-making the drama room operated as a polis (Apple and Beane 1995) with all children able to contribute, work creatively and cooperatively, and be recognized for their contributions. The culmination of a series of democratic negotiations was a collective performance in which all children could see something of their own invention and input. We note that Neelands (2009) has also observed democratic creative practice in drama classrooms where ensemble pedagogies similarly promote inclusion, participation and creative practice.

### **What can teachers learn from story-makers?**

In conclusion we consider what these three stories and our introduction of the notion of inclusive axiology, decentred epistemology, and democratic creative practice might have to offer in today’s policy context.

We must begin by recognizing that there are clearly overlaps between what teachers and artists do in schools. Indeed, some teachers are artists and some artists are teachers. But during the life of the Signature Pedagogies project we were often asked if there were things that artists can do that teachers can’t. Our answer

must, in part, be yes. The two are not interchangeable. There are clearly issues of training involved; a story-maker has trained for most of her/his life on their art form and a teacher has by definition spent a long time developing her/his pedagogic expertise. Artists and teachers generally do different things. However, we think that trying to answer this kind of question is not a helpful way to proceed.

There is utility, we suggest, in considering what teachers might *learn* from engagement with artists. Some teachers could clearly benefit from learning new techniques and gaining new intellectual insights into the arts. In addition, some artists could clearly benefit in learning from teachers more about new pedagogic approaches and gaining new intellectual insights into education and young people.

But what *do* teachers learn from artists? Many teachers that we have seen in other research projects have acquired some of the repertoire of pedagogic practices that artists use. This was the case in both John and Mark's schools where teachers and teaching assistants regularly took an active part in the story-making programme. We have no doubt, and we have evidence in our combined project data, that when shared practice occurred students and teachers alike benefited. There is little doubt for instance that the teacher embarrassed about her students' behaviour could gain from Terina's inclusive axiology. Adopting her process of allowing children to offer their own imaginings, as a way to connect to an otherwise new and strange story, would not be too difficult to incorporate into everyday teaching practice. And it would support a strategy to counter some of the dominant knowledges at work via a national curriculum and commercially produced curriculum materials. Teachers could also, and of course some do (see Kathy Hall *et al.* 2013), deliberately set out to decentre dominant knowledges just as John sought out children's home and neighbourhood understandings.

But how widespread is this kind of teacher learning? In another CP funded research project, Galton (2008) noted three forms of teachers' learning from creative practitioners – (1) learning techniques and processes so that they could be reproduced in the classroom in the same kind of way and around the same topic; (2) applying techniques and processes to other areas of the curriculum; and (3) understanding the pedagogical principles that underpinned the practices that artists used. We observed these same learning outcomes (Thomson *et al.* 2009), and also noted that some teachers did not extrapolate from what their students did in creative projects to other parts of the curriculum (Christine Hall *et al.* 2007). In other words, teachers did not ask, "What is there about the students' success in this project that might help me redesign my pedagogical practices?" The Signature Pedagogies project addresses the need for teachers to build a principled pedagogical language for a repertoire of practice, tools and techniques, and we hope that it will be used for this purpose.

However, such teacher learning still has limits. Our experience and research suggest that at least some of the differences between artists and teachers stems from their positioning and the expectations and roles associated with this. Teachers, because of their position within the institutional context of school, work in a complex frame

of national policy, public expectations and local institutional interpretations of policy and educational purposes. They have ongoing responsibilities for ensuring that children meet mandated curriculum outcomes. This, as a considerable body of research suggests (e.g. Ball 2003; Craft 2005; Jeffrey and Woods 2009), frames what it is that they are able to do no matter how creative they are. What they are **able** to do may in fact exceed what it is **possible** to do within their particular context. While it is easy to suggest, for example, that the teachers might adopt a universalist approach to inclusion, as we have suggested that the artists we saw did, it is difficult to see how this might happen in a context where national and international policy frames inclusion quite differently. However, we note current efforts to shift away from ability grouping (Hart *et al.* 2012), and this suggests that even the shibboleth of ability and meritocracy is possible to shift.

Artists, even those who are artists-in-residence as were two of our story-makers, are visitors in schools; their position is as an institutional 'other'. Artists are positioned to do different things from teachers within schools. They are not a substitute for teachers (and vice versa). As Pringle (2002) notes, the job of artists in schools is often to 'stir things up a bit'. Artists bring with them new and sometimes challenging frames of reference and purposes from their life-worlds – they may value openness, ambiguity, questioning rather than answering. Teachers are not able to maintain these in times when 'right answers' are still the currency of tests and exams. Nevertheless, as artists and teachers work together they create more and less stable time/spaces where their frames and purposes working together produce new – and we argue, more democratic and inclusive - practices. It is for this reason that we suggest that there will always be a role for artists to play in schools, as these two positions - artist and teacher - are not the same, not interchangeable.

At present, the contribution of artists to schools in England may appear to be largely a question of interrupting the dominant mode of teaching/learning, of providing a welcome relief for all involved. However, we suggest that something else is simultaneously occurring. The axiological commitments, inclusive epistemologies and democratic structures and processes used by artists also provide exemplars of alternative pedagogical practice. These are in effect, we suggest, an ongoing and living compendium of possibilities that might be taken up more consistently in a changed policy environment.

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