

# Perspectives from the literature



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# Perspectives from the literature

Graham Jeffery reflects on some of the research issues and questions linked to the TAPP programme

This booklet is structured as follows:

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# 01

## Introduction

**Notes & Remarks** Jot down your thoughts in the margin here...

Pedagogic partnerships between teachers and artists are useful because they tend to bring to the surface issues that may be taken for granted or hidden in learning settings. They can have a catalytic impact because they enable

hidden or unconsidered assumptions about the use of time and space, the organisation of learning, or even established relationships with individual learners to be questioned and challenged. Partnerships can provide a sense of authenticity and engagement because they shift learning into the 'border zone' between the worlds of education, culture and communities, opening up a wider set of contexts and reference points for learning than a single teacher or school can provide alone. So the notion of 'creative partnership' is a synthesis of a variety of perspectives, some drawn from vocational learning and the tradition of practitioner as

teacher, some drawn from informal and community education, and others from models of interdisciplinary and applied learning, aesthetic education, and elements of 'outreach' and participation strategies for cultural organisations (Jeffery, 2005). However, in order for the potential of collaboration to be unlocked, TAPP believes that there is a need to develop a critical and reflective approach that displays a sensitivity to potential inequalities and differences of perspective between the partners. Alongside this critical attitude, a strong commitment to ambitious and artistically challenging practice needs to be fostered.

## 02 Artist-educators and arts education

The notion of the artist-educator or teacher artist has a considerable history.

### Artist-teachers

Firstly, art and design education (and some traditions in the performing arts) has championed the 'artist-teacher' (Thornton, 2004). In the model of artist-teacher, the skill and craft of the arts practitioner is blended with pedagogical knowledge in order to develop forms of teaching that mobilise notions of artistic 'authenticity' and integrity. This develops forms of cultural apprenticeship between learner and teacher, some of which have been described in traditions

of 'discipline based arts education' in the USA (which Eisner, 2002, explains clearly). Under hierarchical arrangements learners are apprenticed to the 'master artist' and learn through exposure to his or her craft and skills, but the learning process can also take a more dialogic form, involving 'collaboration' and facilitation' in which the teacher does not seek to direct outcomes but to enable creativity. In most learning, a combination of instruction and collaboration is usually found, but with different emphases in different settings. This is commonly cited in the principle of practitioner-teacher found in conservatoires and art colleges. It is also found in some versions of early years education and, more recently, entrepreneurially focused vocational education and training; in these approaches, education is aligned with preparation for the workplace and expert practitioners, who may or may not be formally trained as 'teachers', take a role in mentoring and supporting learners (for a recent example see McWilliam, 2008; see also Harland et al, 2005).

### Teaching as artistry

Secondly, a rich vein of research from Dewey to Stenhouse to Schon has championed the idea of teaching itself as a type of artistry, which involves making rich, complex judgements about teaching. This is a form of students in the processes of cultural empowered, active professionalism in which the creative decisions taken in everyday teaching settings mobilise tacit knowledge and subtle communication skills with learners.

Teacher and artist:

Can I be both teacher and artist? While the artist was in a position to completely immerse herself in the process of play with the children once a relationship of trust had been established, I had other incidental duties to manage that impinged upon my ability to become completely absorbed.

*Becky Powell, TAPP 2005/06*

### The arts as resources for learning

Thirdly the work of art itself is a huge resource for learning. Works of art are made, encountered and 'performed' in a huge range of social settings, and the interaction between the art 'object' – whether a play, painting, piece of music or piece of media – and its social and cultural contexts provides educators with a massive array of questions, issues, philosophical and aesthetic materials that they can invite learners to explore (Bosch, 1998 and Dewey, 1934).

Partnership based pedagogies seek to increase learner engagement by involving students in the processes of cultural production and participation, drawing on the social world of cultural institutions. They promote active engagement, which includes observation and acquiring cultural knowledge through being in an audience or culturally focused visits. They are perhaps less likely to take notions of cultural value as 'givens' and are more inclined to open up the processes of cultural production to debate and re-interpretation. This is because, when working well and in a framework of open-ness and dialogue, they tend to encourage a process of negotiation between the cultural assumptions of the school and those of the collaborating partner, as well as a self-critical attitude on the part of educators in which their own cultural assumptions, histories and preferences are deconstructed and examined.

From a TAPP perspective, what we call 'participant-centred' arts learning is based on encouraging involvement in the processes of making and doing in the arts – projects which foreground student engagement and inventiveness rather than exercising tight teacher control over the precise form and content of what learners produce.

Paradoxically, developing such projects successfully requires a high degree of control and skill from the facilitator, but conceived of in a different sense from traditional teachercentred instruction in which learner autonomy is limited to the teacher's view of what is the 'correct' outcome. Pedagogical frameworks that are enabling and open require careful attention to structure, resources, and group dynamics. In this version of arts education, observation and analysis are an important part of planning and 'aesthetic appreciation' is developed through an involvement in making new work as well as experiencing the work of others. In becoming familiar with a range of cultural texts, products and processes, and making cultural products themselves, learners can develop more sophisticated forms of engagement which feed back into a richer cultural environment for learning.

#### Learning through making art

Fourthly, the learning process of making art – particularly processes based in professional studio practice or rehearsal for performance – is used as an educational model. These processes often involve group collaboration but it is important to remember that they can also be highly solitary and individual. Sometimes the justification for students being involved in these

processes is presented in terms of the generic or transferable 'soft' skills that they develop, such as collaboration, communication or team working. Art-making is intimately bound up with identity and selfawareness; this enables teachers and learners to make space in the pressurised social world of the school for self-expression, and can validate many different forms of cultural experience and affiliation.

In most learning, a combination of instruction and collaboration is usually found, but with different emphases in different settings

Irreconcilable tensions:

The positives in art education work are evident and well documented, and I value the work I do in schools highly. However there are aspects of working as an artist in secondary schools which do not sit right:

- The constant call for collaboration in an area which is often about a fairly solitary, highly personal exploration
- The emphasis on verbal communication in a subject which is often about an individual language that has nothing to do with words
- The focus on artists as some sort of uniquely, innately skilled creative problem solvers who will be able to redress an inherent lack in the system
- The desire to promote equal partnerships in a system where artists and teachers can never be equal
- A blurring of expectation between the definitions of 'artist' and 'art educator'
- An over-simplification of what an artist is, packaging them to fulfil a 'required' service
- Time, as a contributing factor to all the above, is not valued enough.

Thurle Wright, TAPP 2006/07

**Notes & Remarks** Because arts education is increasingly annexed to a wider agenda of 'creativity', which includes, but is not limited to, the arts and cultural education, there are often considerable elisions and ambiguities between the four positions set out above. The TAPP research points to the notion of 'creative professionalism' as a possible reconciling identity for those working in this fast-moving field, in which it is common for practitioners to adopt multiple roles and identities according to the different contexts in which they operate.

## 03 Artists in schools

Emily Pringle's 2002 report, *We Did Stir Things Up: The Role of Artists in Sites for Learning*, provides some ways into discussion of the issues. She explores the many different roles that artists may play in working in educational settings. Frequently artists are labelled as 'catalysts' or 'change agents' but the evidence from the TAPP research is that either just playing the role of agent provocateur or being invoked as a 'catalyst' in the face of the resilient (and resistant?) systems of schools and colleges is unlikely to be successful unless this work is undertaken within a framework of dialogue and conversation. Teachers and school leaders need to be willing to engage with some of the challenges of embedding this approach into the pressured world of the school. This is why TAPP places such great emphasis on shared

reflection and dialogue in order for both teachers and artists to be enabled to arrive at a mutual understanding of the problems and issues involved in the work of 'partnership'.

There can be a tendency for some programmes to fall into the trap that 'creativity' is something to be supplied by the artist or visiting professional. This may pose a particular risk if it is suggested that what a school or a teacher needs is a kind of 'injection' of creativity. In the longer term the key issue is to strengthen the capacity and expertise for creativity within the education system as a whole. So, long-term, shared professional development is critical.

In the TAPP programme, attention was drawn to the considerable heritage of this work in forty years of participatory arts practice and in countless innovations at the boundaries between schools and communities. We also emphasised the ways in which professional development processes can feed back into learning, pedagogic change and development in schools and cultural organisations.

The engagement between schools and artists could be regarded as an encounter between different kinds of cultural practices, each with

their own conventions, codes and approaches.

The TAPP experience suggests that if this engagement is approached in the spirit of a conversation rather than an intervention from outside, it is likely to be more successful. A second dimension is that the artistry and creative professionalism of teachers needs also be recognised and supported. A conversational and dialogic framework for professional development is intended to achieve this.

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agent

## 04 Artists in 'dialogue'?

The notion of 'artist in residence' can sometimes carry the sense of a 'retreat', but in education the artist in residence is usually seen as a type of public engagement or provocation. There is a considerable history of artists entering into dialogue with other sectors, in industry, in healthcare, in communities and in education, but the documentation is very fragmented. Artists play many different roles in the modern economy of cultural production, beyond producing cultural products for commercial markets. In fact their skills and experience are in increasing demand as part of a shift towards a more networked and knowledge based society. Some artists, informed by developments in the performing and participatory arts and 'dialogic aesthetics', lean more towards using their creative and cultural skills as a social service, rather than as simply the capacity to make physical (or digital) objects or artefacts to be bought and sold in a marketplace. They may see themselves as enablers, connectors

and collaborators rather than individualist autonomous practitioners. Teachers of the arts, as Henry Giroux (1996) points out, are also 'cultural workers' who put their artistic expertise at the service of others. Many artists (and some teachers) have 'portfolio' careers that span the worlds of commerce, community, education and social media, with much contemporary arts practice difficult to compartmentalize in a fast-moving informational economy.

A common agenda in residencies is that artists are invited to act as either a kind of 'grit in the oyster' in order to stimulate or provoke change, or that they are commissioned to 'aestheticise' the working environment by producing artistic interventions in the form of public artworks or participatory projects. This is a heavy burden for artists to carry – and not all artists may be comfortable with this role. But the underlying thesis, common in conversations about business innovation, and in interdisciplinary practice, is that engagement from different perspectives leads to

new insights, feeds innovation, and helps professionals to redesign and re-imagine their practices. The evidence from the TAPP research is that some of the most effective innovation takes place when artists and teachers focus on pedagogic change at the level of the class or in small groups of students, with focused areas of enquiry, a clear shared understanding of what is being attempted, and an emphasis on testing and refining pedagogy.

Playing the role of agent provocateur or being invoked as a 'catalyst' in the face of the resilient (and resistant?) systems of schools and colleges is unlikely to be successful unless this work is undertaken within a framework of dialogue and conversation

## 05 Artists as 'role model'

In a 'liberal' version of arts education, it is the aesthetic and craft skill of the artist, allied to their deep historical or cultural knowledge of the art form, that students learn to appreciate, emulate and reinvent for themselves (Eisner, 2002). In a more 'economic' version of this discourse, the artist is cast as a 'model' cultural worker – modelling collaborative practices of the workplace, the 'project team' in the creative industries, or demonstrating and sharing their 'creative process' with groups through acting as a workshop leader, facilitator or choreographer (McWilliam, 2008). There are various justifications advanced for this, some cast in the language of vocational or business education, essentially giving learners experience of the professional practice and milieu of the artist. A further, socially oriented model of arts education is that artists with particular ethnic backgrounds or other attributes deemed to be educationally desirable are cast as 'role models' for young people and representatives of particular cultural forms.

There are particular risks attached to all three of these representations, which at worst can be tokenistic, but at best can be transformative.

Measuring the success of an artist's work in the classroom in terms of whether learners achieve predefined 'learning outcomes' may neutralise the potential of the pedagogic partnership

## 06 Artists and curriculum ‘outcomes’

One of the most commonplace assumptions is that artists are employed to assist in the delivery of ‘curriculum goals’ and that introducing greater involvement by artists in students’ learning will raise standards of achievement. This is an approach championed in different ways by the ‘arts integration’ movement in the USA (Aprill, Burnaford and Weiss, 2001) and by Creative Partnerships in the UK. While there is some evidence that this may often be the case, measuring the success of an artist’s work in the classroom in terms of whether learners achieve predefined ‘learning outcomes’ may neutralise the potential of the pedagogic partnership, unless there is a commitment to exploring slightly more broadly what the terms of engagement are. For this reason we strongly advocate for sufficient time to be allocated to planning, preparation and evaluation so that a clarity about the status of the artist’s work in relation to curricular frameworks can be achieved. Paradoxically, the most spectacular shifts in outcomes are often achieved when the most attention is paid to refining the processes through which the artist and teacher collaborate.

Dialogic teaching:

The challenge I have faced, in seeking to create a more dialogic relationship with students, has been in promoting critical listening and questioning amongst themselves; they view me as the ‘subject who is supposed to know’ (Lacan 1981:232). In an attempt to assert a change in my authority from teacher to artistic collaborator, participant and learner within the pedagogical environment, I had previously worked with a Theatre-in-Education practitioner to develop a workshop (influenced by the work of Heathcote and Boal) in which I was in role as an artist. The intention had been to for me to model risk taking in the creative process.

Siobhan O’Shea, TAPP 2005/06

## 07 Complex histories

Since the mid-1970s many accounts have been written of artistic interventions into schools. However, no systematic account of this work is available, although a fairly extensive bibliography is accessible on the TAPP pages of the IVE website and in research surveys undertaken in the US (Fiske, 2002; Seidel, 2002). Some of these accounts are those that foreground the ethical dimensions of this practice and which root the approach in traditions of community based learning, socially engaged practice and participatory approaches to making art. Here the work of the artists is as much about enabling other people to act creatively alongside them as it is about the expression and communication of their own individual artistic 'vision'. But there are many fine lines between inspiring others to create, producing innovative new work, reinterpreting the past, and encouraging knowledge and appreciation of different cultural forms. Not all artists, intensely protective of their individual practice, on which their livelihood

depends, will be content to have their work or their role recast **Notes & Remarks** in officially sanctioned programmes of cultural learning. But it is precisely in exploiting the tensions, cracks and contradictions of the contested cultural, social and aesthetic field that 'productive pedagogies' – special cultural and creative learning experiences – can be activated.

Not all artists...will be content to have their work or their role recast in officially sanctioned programmes of cultural learning

## 08 The cultural politics of pedagogic partnerships

In each type of institutional setting in which artist-educators are found – e.g. the museum, the gallery, the university, the theatre, the school, the neighbourhood arts centre – there are complex cultural politics centred on the symbolic capital that the institution attracts and represents: i.e. how it is valued and represented, and by whom. For example, some art forms and art form training institutions attract considerably more public resources, support and attention than others. Contrast the working lives of those regularly employed in a generously funded ‘temple of culture’, such as a major conservatoire or museum, with the experience of an early-career artist working from a shed or a bedroom; or the different working lives of a classically trained actor, musician or dancer and a volunteer tutor in a neighbourhood arts centre (although many artists work in and across the divides between popular and high culture). Artist-educators work in and between many different kinds of institutions and spaces in a highly mobile informational economy; the so-called creative economy can be experienced by its front-line workers as one of considerable insecurity, precariousness and exclusion. The proliferation of participatory spaces, media platforms and arts-educational projects provides opportunities, but also highlights divisions and differences in status and resources between individuals and artistic sectors. These tensions have to be navigated and negotiated in the everyday practices and conversations of pedagogic partnerships (Jeffery, 2005).

## 09 Mediated conversations, occupational mythologies and professional identities

The TAPP's Mediated Conversations research project focused quite narrowly on the linguistic forms and descriptions used by practitioners working together in both TAPP and the related programme Eastfeast. Even the terms 'teacher' and 'artist' are far from unproblematic. They describe roles with complex social histories and mobilise powerful mythologies and stereotypes, which when used in everyday conversation can easily lead to muddles and misunderstandings. Teachers and artists are perceived differently by learners and this can lead to useful forms of pedagogic encounter.

Most participants, whether they primarily defined themselves as 'teachers', 'artists' or 'arts educators' in TAPP and Eastfeast, had complex career histories with multiple affiliations across both the education sector and the field of culture. Partnership based pedagogies seek to recognise,

value and mobilise these in forms of curriculum and project design which allow for a richer encounter between learners and different kinds of 'teacher' than the common model of one teacher/one classroom/thirty children all of the same age. Many other combinations are possible, but in order for these to become embedded in the everyday working lives of schools, a radical shift in the way in which pedagogy is conceived of is needed – one that regards schools as nodes in a much wider learning network encompassing cultural institutions, neighbourhood and community resources, and fosters the skills in educators to build projects across these divides.

The territories occupied by teachers and artists seeking to collaborate are far from being a 'level playing field'. They are shaped by complex power gradients that often take the conversational form of mythologies, muddles and misunderstandings, which may contain partial truths but rarely reflect the whole picture. A few examples of such mythologies and muddles that emerge from analysis of the

‘generative metaphors’ underpinning some of these conversations might be as follows:

- Salaried educators and freelance artists face totally different economic realities and everyday priorities
- Artists and cultural organisations embody cultural authenticity while the culture of schools is controlling and highly regulated
- The creative freedom of the individual artist is in tension with the ethical commitment of the teacher to the wellbeing of children
- ‘Risk’ is to be avoided in schools and embraced in the arts
- The systematic and regulated nature of daily timetabled life in the school is a world away from the ‘creative laboratory’ of the artist’s studio
- The outcome-driven assessment systems of the school may appear to ignore questions of quality and value, central to the arts, that are not easily reduced to grades and ‘levels’.

These root metaphors and occupational mythologies in the discourses of teachers and artists need to be interrogated and unpacked. At times of stress, there is sometimes a tendency, for practitioners to fall back on unproblematised definitions such as these, drawn from reference orientations. A task for like-minded CPD programmes is therefore to develop in students the cast of mind which can hold some of the concepts in the notion of artist-teacher in tension, whilst still being able to act constructively and courageously in the complex contact zone between formal education and the cultural sector. It could be argued that this is precisely the kind of critical ‘high wire act’, ultimately a characteristic of creativity and critical intelligence, that CPD programmes designed to promote partnership based pedagogy should be seeking to develop.

Teachers and artists are perceived differently by learners and this can lead to useful forms of pedagogic encounter

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