



# Imagination is the key...

*Unlocking the creative potential of our young people can provide a major boost to society in an age of change, writes Esme Chilton, CEO of Future Creative CIC...*

**C**reativity develops the capacity to imagine the world differently. We all need the ability not just to cope with change, but to positively thrive on it and engineer it for ourselves. Therefore, young people deserve the tools to conceptualise how the world could be different and the inner confidence and motivation to make it happen. They need to be able to take risks and fail confidently. To do this, young people need to enjoy learning how to seek out relevant information, apply knowledge and skills in new and imaginative ways and try out ideas in real world situations.

Projects and programmes that have creative thinking and collaboration at their heart have proved powerful tools for supporting change and development for individuals and organisations – for example, by bringing teachers, creative partners and young people together in a school to become co-constructors of learning; health workers, creative partners and patients together in hospitals to improve health and wellbeing; and local authorities, creative partners and communities together to improve social cohesion.

Creativity is not simply about ‘doing the arts’. It is about questioning, making connections, inventing, thinking

differently and flexing the imaginative muscles. Familiar social and cultural norms are shifting. The world is changing around us and the pace of change is increasing, creating more challenging environments. In order to thrive rather than just survive, we need to develop a greater capacity to deal with uncertainty, complexity and not always knowing the answer. The most interesting organisations and people to support the exploration and discovery of new answers and different solutions can often be found in the arts and creative sectors.

In addition to focusing on the needs of young people, adult learning and skills development can be transformed through the same approaches. Where creative learning and professional development experiences are used to advance a participant’s skills, knowledge and understanding in one particular learning sphere, they will also be honing vital talents such as teamwork and critical thinking as a bonus. This helps participants to reach their full potential and also to apply it in the real world. Training and Creative Professional Development (CPD), that foregrounds creative learning through collaboration, achieves highly successful and sustainable results in and around corporate and public

sector organisations, the education and cultural sectors, and personal development areas.

### Future Jobs Fund Initiative

Through a recent collaboration funded by Kent County Council to develop and broker the Future Jobs Fund Initiative, Kent-based creative and cultural sector organisations were involved in matching up potential creative industries work placement hosts with young people on Job Seeker’s Allowance. To ensure sustainability, a creative life skills CPD programme was designed to provide the young people with support and ongoing training during their six month placement.

By harnessing and developing existing skills within a creative working environment, the initiative aims to inspire and potentially create new jobs for unemployed young people (primarily aged 18-24) and others who face significant disadvantages in the labour market.

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### The Sensory Journey Partnership Project

For children and young people from early years and primary school to secondary school, the extended and alternative curriculum work developed by the creative and cultural sector can exploit the power of creative collaboration. The Sensory Journey Partnership Project, for example, engaged with parents and carers at a children’s centre to give them the confidence and know how to support their children’s learning and development. Working in collaboration with creative partners, various practitioners and crèche workers, parents and carers were encouraged through creative activity to explore child development theory and how it related to their own child. The capabilities developed by parents through this sort of creative process have strengthened their self-confidence, raised their aspirations and equipped them with skills for life.

### Creativity in Leadership Professional Development

Collaborative approaches to developing creative leaders have proved equally successful, as illustrated by the Creativity in Leadership Professional Development programme for headteachers. The scheme was funded and commissioned by local authority partners hoping to facilitate an innovative residential CPD programme to kick-start a ‘Buddying Project’. Headteachers from 32 schools and early years settings were involved. The CPD residential offered headteachers a range of ideas for change through creativity.

Over the following year, creative partners worked alongside headteachers to support their early years practitioners in facilitating child-led creative learning sessions within a woodland environment. All involved worked collaboratively to develop the sessions while responding to the surroundings, valuing and supporting the input from children and parents rather than following a pre-packaged lesson plan. This versatile and adaptable method encouraged and supported both facilitators and participants to think creatively, take risks, and imagine new solutions and realistic possibilities.

### Kentish Delights

Programmes developed by the creative and cultural sector have been effective in helping to break down social barriers, with the positive aim of enhancing and strengthening community cohesion and sharing cultural experiences. For example, the ‘Kentish Delights’ outreach programme, commissioned by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and funded by Renaissance South East, is currently linking over 1,000 young people and adults with five creative partners across nine towns in Kent and reaching a further 12,000 community members through its outreach activities. Through this project, participants are encouraged to explore their local museum collections via creative workshops and historical storytelling, uncovering hidden histories and creating new stories about their local geography and heritage.

### The right to creative learning

Creative activity involves playing with ideas and trying out possibilities. Critical evaluation and reflection involve a shift in focus of attention and way of thinking as we attend to what is working and what is not working. This can permeate the process of generating ideas; it can involve standing back in quiet reflection; it can be individual or shared; or involve instant judgements or long-term testing. In most creative work there are many shifts between these two modes of thought and focus of attention. The quality of creative achievement is related to both. Helping people to understand and manage this interaction between generative and evaluative thinking is a pivotal take on creative learning and development.

Everyone has the innate human ability to use and enjoy creative skills in their lives and the right, through education, professional training and community development, to opportunities to develop and hone those skills to transform their lives and the world around them for the better.



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