

MODELS OF EXCHANGE, RESEARCH TRIO WITH CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP, LONDON NORTH

I have tried to find extracts from my final report that will spark questions or comments in you the reader.
For a full copy of the report contact me at dancingstrong@yahoo.com

Extract from Chapter 5 - Findings

Themes

In the transforming the field text into research text I saw four themes that ran across the triangulation of all my data. These are:

- 1) Supporting an overarching principle of learning through use of the arts
- 2) Theory shaped into structure
- 3) Clarifying use of language and in the Arts
- 4) Past / present moments: the roles guilt and joy play in learning.

Supporting an overarching principle of learning through use of the arts

From my conversation with the four Headteachers in England and interaction with educators in USA during the research trip, I noticed that many people referred to abstract ideas which they used as a framework for their relationship to teaching and learning. These abstract ideas could be called principle, values or belief systems (faith). I will refer to them as values for the rest of this chapter.

All four Headteachers referred to a set of values that they supported or encouraged within their school.

"I'm interested in the whole child...This is about the whole child...My experience with new teachers is that they bring the repertoire that builds on what people had before. So in some ways...maybe they do become more creative as they develop but it's the confidence within the team that they work in and the institution that's the enabling factor." *Interviewee (1)*

.... These values seemed to create a framework for staff to work in while providing a structure for new staff to fit into; a set of guide lines that also supported pupils in finding direction within the school. They also played a role in defining the direction for attitudes to learning.

This use of values was also evident in the theatre companies we visited and the schools we visited in USA. These abstract thoughts - values - run parallel with the business models mentioned in some texts in my literature search also, here of course they are call 'mission statements'. The idea of having an overarching ideology is not new to any organization but what I noticed in my research was that there is a distinction between these mission statements, between those handed down through general policy and more specific ones.

In schools that are faith based, business and arts companies the decisions and trust of the activity the organization undertakes is overwhelmingly grounded in the mission statement, with policy coming from above in the form of boards or churches that are also committed to the same mission. The individuals in these organizations are there because they share the same religion or belief in the company and have a strong stakehold in the success of the organization partly because the success of the organization confirms their own belief system is correct, validating their shared principles...

... However in state schools the decisions are imposed from above by government policy which obviously shares a broad application of shared principles with the school (to educate) but by the nature of their size and having to cover the needs of a variety of schools cannot supply the more focused specific set of values needed by individual schools. This can manifest itself as a tension for school staff in implementing generic policies without having clear direction for specific needs...

...I felt that the arts were used to 'rally round' and encourage staff and pupils. Many staff in schools talked about arts programs giving them more confidence and how pupils enjoyed coming to school more. The act of art was more important than the arts themselves. The arts were not used as a learning tool but as a set of principles that allowed for an attitude to learning, allowed for a structure that could unite the staff and pupils in a set of activities. The arts themselves were very rarely used in learning but used to validate a way of learning together. I am not judging this use of art as acceptable or not. However I do believe caution should be used when using the arts in this way...

Theory shaped into structure

There is currently no place for theory in the day to day running of a school. I saw a number of strategies that implemented learning theories such as Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences or Edward de Bono's Thinking Hats but all of these had been manipulated into a structure in order for the school to embrace it into the day-to-day running. This structure took the literal form of a structure often with diagrams of the theory throughout the school...

...Clarifying use of language and in the Arts

There was not a universal use of language neither amongst the people we met during the USA trip nor amongst the people I spoke to in the UK. I see a distinction between some words that I feel is very important to define within arts programmes.

Skill v Principle

There is no differential in language between the use of the arts in schools being taught as a skill. i.e. learning an instrument, learning a dance and the arts being used as a means to a learning goal i.e. using the principle of the art form to discover a learning outcome that is not particularly associated with that art form. These are very different uses of arts programmes in schools. The fact that we have not developed a language that denotes the different uses for the arts means we run the risk of being unaware when we are using them. I noticed that fine art in one school was about learning perspective and fine art in another school was used to make a picture to better understand algebra. Both these were fine art programs in schools but very different

Past / present moments: the roles guilt and joy play in learning...

Excerpt from Chapter Six - Conclusions and Recommendations:

Mind / body relationship in schools:

I am not commenting on higher level interactions between mind / body in school because of the design of schools and the overwhelming assumption that sitting still at a desk is the form in which learning happens. The relationship here is at its most base level; how the mind and body interact to support meaningful learning. Other researchers on the trip also looked at this: Hansjörg was looking at the use of light in school, Jonathan was looking at happiness. There was a general trend towards acknowledging the architecture of the school had an impact of the spirits and attitude of the pupils and staff. Teachers commented on 'nice' classrooms; some schools had plans for changing the architectural features.

But the mind / body relationship was not honoured at the core of the structures of most schools mainly because as in most schools there were times and places for body - physical responses or times and places for mind -mental ones.

Recommendation 2: I must qualify this recommendation by saying that the arts are valid within the education of an individual in their own right just as Mathematics and Literacy are valid. But they can also bring enormous benefits to the foundations of education as a supportive part of the overarching principles of learning.