

## **5x5x5=creativity**

*True education flowers at the point when delight falls in love with responsibility. If you love something, you want to look after it.*

Philip Pullman, Saturday Guardian, January 22, 2005

*Imagine a world where our children are engaged in serious creative play, where their environments are full of space and light ... where adults are companions in the children's enquiries about the world ... creative adults who show a deep respect for children's ideas, theories and fascinations ...*

Penny Hay, Director of Research  
February 2009

We asked colleagues to provide a short statement that includes an endorsement of the work of 5x5x5=creativity (especially in relation to the positive outcomes for those children and adults participating in the research and highlighting what would be lost if 5x5x5=creativity research was ended) ...

### **5x5x5=creativity**

Most people of all backgrounds are good at exchanging thoughts about their childhood and school experiences. With a bit of tickling, people can identify key events, good and bad, and comment on the conditions which made some episodes stand out.

5x5x5 is one of those ideas where the magnetic filings get the chance to gather and line up.

Seems like common sense, but it's rare to see these words of 'purposeful' focus concentrating on how humans become imaginative engines, collectively as well as individually.

Richard Wentworth  
Artist, patron  
Professor and Master of Drawing  
Ruskin College of Drawing and Fine Art  
Oxford University

## **5x5x5=creativity**

5x5x5 brings an impressively rigorous approach to the learning of both children and professionals based on close documentation and attention to the detail of what fascinates young minds. The commitment to partnership work involving both those in educational settings and those working in creative / arts / cultural contexts offers a powerful framework for nurturing creativity in children and young people. The work of the project offers cutting edge insights into how creativity can be nurtured through researchful practice, vital to the development of educational futures in a rapidly changing world.

Anna Craft  
Patron  
Professor of Education  
Exeter University and Open University

## **5x5x5=creativity**

Recent policy initiatives reflect a major cultural change in thinking about the importance of the earliest years, at the heart of which is a commitment to improving the quality of provision for our youngest children and their families and to reducing inequality. 5x5x5=creativity has a critical role to play in meeting this challenge, as this research has been quietly transforming early years practice for almost eight years. Through the creation of communities of enquiry, practitioners, artists and cultural organisations have come together to reflect deeply on their roles as educators and creative enablers in order to better understand the world of the child. Children and adults are empowered and their experiences enriched through a clearly defined set of philosophical principles that recognise children as 'innate and creative knowledge builders'. These opportunities for collaborative learning have inspired new journeys of discovery, generating confidence to embrace new ways of working and environments where innovation and creativity can flourish. Almost invariably, excellent early years practice across the South West can now be traced back to a 5x5x5 connection and the power of this creative spark cannot be lost.

Sally Jaeckle  
Trustee  
Regional Director, National Strategies

## **5x5x5=creativity**

Over the last seven years I have worked in two 'failing' schools; in one as headteacher and in one as a member of the Senior Management Team. These schools subsequently moved out of the fail category and I have therefore some experience of being involved in the whole business of 'turning a school around'. I believe that if there was a single factor that enabled me, and inspired me, in this work, work which involved moving a school out of the murky depths of demoralisation, helping it to become not only a place where exciting and significant learning was taking place daily within an atmosphere of fun and enjoyment, but also a place where teachers could rediscover their own passion for teaching and learning...that single factor, looking back, would be the insights I gained from my work with the CEDES research project and my subsequent involvement with 5x5x5=creativity. These projects firstly enabled me to reconnect with my own passion for, and commitment to, a democratic and inclusive pedagogy but, in addition, helped me to redefine myself as a 'creative' educator/practitioner who sought to facilitate and enable the learning journeys of others.

In essence, these projects gave me courage, helped me to be brave, allowed me to develop and strengthen my own integrity so that I could face some of those giants of the education system which sometimes appear to arrive in droves in the shape of endless, soulless initiatives and strategies, handed down from on high, often appearing to bear very little relevance to where we as teachers stand on the chalkface. I had the courage to say 'no' sometimes. I was brave enough not to focus overly on national curriculum levels and sublevels or on points of progress, though it is also true to say I did not entirely ignore these markers. What I did do was to look to the young people, to their ideas about learning and sought to respect and facilitate their own learning journeys, endeavouring to help them make their own ways through their early school careers.

I have come to question why it is we assume that 'schooling' is inherently good and have allowed myself to wonder what would happen if? I realise how much we tend to short change children by not listening to their voices. I have also come to realise that, if I am to be serious as an educator, I need to (re)learn the '100 languages' of children so that I can truly hear the children and understand what they are saying. An additional advantage of working with artists is the way in which that they can help teachers to rediscover play (itself one of those 100 languages) and it is play, I believe, which allows us, regardless of age, to think outside of the box, allows us to be brave, silent, thoughtful, adventurous, risk takers, to be ourselves and to be others too...

A few months ago I was asked by the local authority to head up another school which is facing difficulties. The results of what I have been doing (good Ofsted) is obviously pleasing to the local authority, and I now hope I will have the opportunity to convince them of the practice behind these apparent successes.

Sue East  
Headteacher, St Andrew's School Bath

### **5x5x5=creativity**

5x5x5=creativity has a transformative ability. It undoubtedly provides the power to change the way children and adults question and value experiences, the way they 'see', the way they are empowered and the way their learning experiences are built. However, 5x5x5 particularly provides the power to enable an intense change in emotion; the emotional bond to experiences and relationships is deepened and learning truly matters. Learning becomes owned and significant not just to the individual but to the community of learners. 5x5x5 allows for personal response based on an intense curiosity and desire to explore. Most importantly these responses become shared and intensified within a strong family. What hope does education have if learning is not passionate and felt? As one colleague explained about her emotional response to 5x5x5=creativity; "I could cope without 5x5x5 for one year but if I thought I'd never do it again, I'd die!"

David Allinson  
Deputy Head, St Vigor and St John Primary School

## **5x5x5=creativity**

5x5x5=creativity challenges the conventional approach to teaching with a refreshing, new dynamic - one that is mutually inspiring and productive for all participants and one that is timely in the changing and uncertain economic and environmental landscape of the 21st century.

5x5x5 demonstrates the extraordinary capacities of children if they are allowed to take the lead in their learning. As a parent with a daughter at a participating school, I have seen the benefits of the 5x5x5 approach at close range. The research project mix offers the freedom and respect to explore, enquire and invent in a stimulating creative space beyond the boundaries and rigour of the curriculum. It liberates and empowers the children and also the teachers, artists and cultural partners who engage with it. This positive influence extends to the 'secondary' audiences of families, schools and cultural settings - introducing new possibilities to nurture, communicate and develop across whole communities.

Lucinda Roberts  
Communications consultant

### **5x5x5=creativity**

It is important that all of us involved with young children's learning should evaluate our practice and principles regularly but the conditions for this process are not easily found. Being part of the 5x5x5 experience has allowed me to take my principles out of my early years teaching backpack, shake them, review – and, indeed, reconsider them - and to confirm them newly to myself and to others. The reflective community and process of 5x5x5 has supported me in this by offering opportunities to ask questions and to suggest and make changes to which I know I am assured respectful responses. And, most crucially for me throughout this, 5x5x5 has at its heart the notion of the competent, capable and communicating child.

Viki Bennett  
Bath Spa University

## **5x5x5=creativity**

The work that happens within 5x5x5=creativity is unusual, exciting and rich because

- it offers practitioners and children a context in which we can develop co-creative communities of inquiry, where we are learning together how to evolve dialogues and explorations, invent ways of researching and try them out.
- as these collaborations become deeper and more complex over a period of time, practitioner boundaries between artists and educators can be softened or even dissolved. In these situations, we are working with our sensibilities, creativity and relational knowledge as well as our physical knowledge – rather than simply bringing generalised pieces of professional knowledge or expertise.
- we (adults and children) become responsible for our own learning, over time and through these complex relationships.
- with each research phase/project we are creating new knowledge which is specific to a set of people (children and adults). When these are considered together, approaches and processes can be found which are valuable in other contexts and situations – i.e. ones that are wider, more generalisable.
- I love finding out about other people (practitioners and children) through collaborative research. It's a wonderful way of seeing each other's ways of thinking and noticing our own qualities because it is done within the research and reflective practice and is therefore lived and dynamic. I think other people enjoy this too.

My sense is that, within 5x5x5 research projects the children explore more adeptly, looking into questions which are far more complex and sophisticated than the topics and learning methods that are offered, facilitated and noticed/tracked in more conventional curriculum situations. I think this is more interesting, challenging and useful for children who can get bored otherwise.

All of these things I am trying to describe are subtle and complicated – they are the sort of outcomes which are easily lost in any description which is trying to be succinct, or trying to address an audience that's strategic or numerous (where local, relational knowledge is meaningless because it is not automatically transferable). So it might not be very noticeable if 5x5x5=creativity research was ended, and that's the danger.

Deborah Aguirre Jones  
Artist

### **5x5x5=creativity**

The educational significance of 5x5x5 is that it enables educators to fulfill their aims in creating educational places for pupils to see that they are recognised and valued for their uniqueness as persons, as learners and as knowledge-creators. The importance of the arts in expressing and developing creativity is at the heart of 5x5x5 as is the recognition of the vital role of collaborative relationships between pupils, teachers and artists in helping pupils to improve their learning. 5x5x5 has developed a coherent and effective programme of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers that is focused on enhancing the learning of pupils through creative arts. The emphasis on documentation of learning has provided evidence for the effectiveness of the collaborative (CPD) programme in sustaining educational conversations with pupils as they work at enhancing their learning.

Dr Jack Whitehead  
Trustee  
Bath University

## **5x5x5=creativity**

The work of 5x5x5=creativity keeps alive and develops the work of Reggio Emilia and its values and practices. The practice of professional networking between artists and educators has proven benefits for children's learning and contributes to their enjoyment of school. The concept of teachers and children as reflective practitioners and therefore as researchers into their own learning is intrinsic to the Assessment for Learning which has recently come under attack and could be supported by the research findings of 5x5x5. To see children as competent learners and environmentalists and citizens in their own right has significant implications for education 3 to 19. Rather than an image of children as passive receivers of pre-digested knowledge 5x5x5 sees children as able to ask questions and find out for themselves, an approach which new developments in the curriculum at primary and secondary level are trying to develop.

Human Scale Education recently took part in an alliance of educators, which included 5x5x5, to look at the Children's Plan a year into its existence. The three main recommendations of its report that was funded by the Potential Trust were that:

- Children and young people learn best through exploration and experiment
- Learning necessarily involves challenge but should never become a strain
- Learning is a social activity conducted through relationships

Mary Tasker  
Trustee  
Chair, Human Scale Education

## 5x5x5=creativity

Snow: 02.02.09

*Children, families, neighbours, friends and acquaintances came together and played in the snow. This wonderful novel, infrequently experienced natural material, beautiful and bright in its whiteness and texture could be used to make anything. There were no goals, no expectations or timetables. Everyone was free to have fun and enjoy playing with ideas and possibilities. They could think differently in this transformed fresh world for one day. There was excitement as exploration and invention happened. All ages were absorbed and happy. Their whole bodies felt the cold, the new challenges in moving, and all their senses were engaged. What they made didn't matter but the 'doing' made them happy. People worked together collaboratively – Radio 4 interviewed a man who made a huge snowball and then went off for a cup of tea leaving a message behind asking anyone to carry on making the ball, and they did. Hyde Park was filled with crowds of snowmen and one family (who excitedly rang me to tell me all about it) made snow ogres and snow lanterns which were lit with tea lights.*

*Probably everyone will remember this day. Memories stored, neural connections made that would not have been made if the children had been in school.*

This is the kind of creative environment we find in 5x5x5=creativity, which has developed an exciting innovative approach to supporting creative learning. Everyone who participates – children, parents, educators, artists and cultural centre colleagues – can be transformed.

We think that even in a difficult economic climate 5x5x5 can continue to concentrate research on four aspects:

- encouraging a belief in children's creative potential and competence which means allowing self-initiated action
- supporting reflective practice among the adults, thus developing a community of thinkers
- encouraging and enabling the use of diverse forms of expression: the hundred languages.
- the benefits of bringing together 3 different colleagues – artist (or perhaps a scientist), educator and cultural centre – this dynamic generates vitality, freshness, experimentation, and possibility thinking.

We see these characteristics being developed across all the teams now 'joined up' in children's services: education, health, family and community.

Mary Fawcett and Susi Bancroft  
Evaluation consultants

## **5x5x5=creativity**

As an educator I believe it was through my collaboration in 5x5x5 research that I began to explore in depth what it meant to trust in the ideas of children; to feel empowered to do so and to change our practice throughout the nursery.

Parents of children now aged 6-11 (children who were protagonists in their own learning at the Kinder Garden), tell me how significant those experiences are to the children. It has left them with a legacy of their ideas being taken seriously, of co-research and co-construction of meaningful ways of knowing, of expressing and communicating their ideas.

Key to this process is the creative collaborative learning community that is 5x5x5 and the relationships and enquiries that it supports. The learning and research of the children, parents, educators, artists, cultural centre partners, mentors, evaluators, and research director is dependent on each other. This gives 5x5x5=creativity its uniqueness. In a world where early childhood centres and schools are tightly governed by top down policies 5x5x5 is essential to giving children, parents, and educators a voice and the support to be research-full. Research in the sense used by Carlina Rinaldi (in Guidici *et al*, 2001): “to describe the paths.....in the direction of new universes of possibility...Research as art: ...within the search for being, the essence, and sense of all things.”

Our challenge is to continue to explore in depth and show the impact and the necessity of trusting and investing in the ideas of children.

Liz Elders  
Mentor

## **5x5x5=creativity**

A close association with 5x5x5=creativity as an artist/researcher has confirmed my belief that the ethos and principles underpinning this organisation effect positive, cultural change within education in its broadest sense.

The ongoing training, mentorship and emphasis on rigorous qualitative research and documentation has provided me with a breadth of experience, skills and more importantly, outlook, that I now find myself transferring in Higher Education contexts, medical-research departments, training courses for special-needs staff and art workshops for patients in a GP surgery.

Without the ongoing research community which 5x5x5=creativity provides I would not have had the confidence to branch out from Early Years education so readily nor would my ongoing workshops have evolved so richly. Should this very unique educational collaboration fragment and cease to be a touchstone for our ongoing development as artist/researchers, the steadily emerging possibilities for extended practice in a number of communities would be deprived of opportunities for growth.

Special-needs units, medical schools, rehabilitation departments and individual surgeries are now expressing interest in the nature and contribution of 5x5x5=creativity. I perceive this interest to be just the start of a slow-burning shift in the medical education model and very excitingly, a strand of creative practice that will impact across the board.

The longitudinal aspect of 5x5x5=creativity research is vital to shift habitual paradigms and support holistic approaches within education. The opportunity to work intensively with particular children for a number of months over two years in a special-needs unit not only led to ways of supporting these children emotionally, socially, cognitively and indeed physically, through intensive observation and creative practice, but also instigated permanent changes in staff perception and practice.

Parallel to my specific 5x5x5=creativity involvement, ongoing workshops in a GP practice in Bristol are nevertheless identical in ethos: One patient recalls "The sheer joy of my first Art session literally took my breath away. I was completely free to experiment with a wide range of materials in an environment that was not merely happy and fun, but was supportive, empowering and non judgmental."

Dr Catherine Lamont-Robinson  
Artist and researcher

## **5x5x5=creativity**

I have been involved with 5x5x5=creativity for 4 years, firstly at Black Swan Arts and more recently as Education Manager at Bath Festivals. The research has had a profound impact on my practice and changed the way I, and therefore the way the organisations I work for, develop creative work with children and adults. It has enabled us to explore our relationships with schools, artists and other cultural centres to make these more meaningful and long-term. I believe that the research is having an impact on schools and supports all involved to develop creative approaches to teaching and learning. Children feel valued and listened to and as a result become more confident and engaged in learning. The adults involved in the research are given valuable time to reflect on their own learning and strong evaluation ensures that this learning can be shared with colleagues. 5x5x5 has an important role to play in the changing world we find ourselves in and I believe should look at consolidating and promoting the valuable research the work has gathered to date to a wider audience, including policy makers.

Louise Betts  
Bath Festivals Trust

## **5x5x5=creativity**

But, I see the future of 5x5x5=creativity lying too strongly in the hands of the funders. If there isn't a funder out there who can embrace the spirit of the organisation with an upfront, full-on commitment to funding the existence of the organisation itself then I can't see the long term future looking that bright.

Perhaps we are looking in the wrong place for financial stability? I think that the world of arts funding is far too 'task' and 'event' led – most funders fail to understand why they would fund a research project that never ends. Why? Because research is less an arts word and more an education word. In my humble experience, research is usually funded by institutions of further or higher education. Before 5x5x5 can set any vision or targets for the future it needs to know that its core funding is in place...and that means 3 years up front at the very least. Is it perhaps time to put the work on hold until such an eventuality has been realised?

anon

I have been fortunate to have been involved in this important project since its beginnings. There are five principal reasons why I whole heartedly endorse 5x5x5 = creativity:

Firstly this is focused on children's and adults's creative learning and there is now powerful evidence from the regular inbuilt evaluation and monitoring that this is taking place

Secondly it is now a unique longitudinal study of childrens' , parents' , creative centre staff and teachers' learning and practice. The annual seminars and regular presentations from the participants have shown a remarkable development and transformation of the associated adults into what I would term effective 'lead learners' who are both acting as learners and leading learning within their the communities of learners . I would hope that the next year's evaluation focuses on this element in particular.

Thirdly, building on the Reggio Emilia effective creative practice the evaluators are also pro-active catalysts who play a significant part in this whole learning network and this also could be an important focus for further important external evaluation.

Fourthly the quality of scholarship and the outcomes in terms of publications that impact on others practice is remarkable and is considerably extending the reach and impact of this important project.

Finally as I am now also involved with another parallel project in East Anglia - East Feast, I can see how this practice being developed by 5x5x5 is part of a national movement to build strong creative partnerships and remove the isolation of teachers in order that young peoples' creativity, independence and initiative are firmly in place before they become adult. This was the ardent wish of our NACCCE Committee and a principal focus within 'All Our Futures' ( the most popular report ever produced and still being read and used today ten years on.

Tamsyn Imison  
Trustee  
Education Strategist

I sometimes muse upon the serendipity of the simultaneous arrival in Bath of 5x5x5 and the egg theatre for children and young people.

The former, a most profound, engaging, bold, rigorous, creative and challenging organisation that dares to put very young children at the helm of their own learning; the latter, a cultural centre, a theatre all about and all for children and young people, but as it happens, only one of about 4 in the country. So Bath is clearly receptive to a heightened sense of what children are capable of and what they deserve. Children, it turns out, are quite clever. And creative. And they enjoy each other's creativity. And we enjoy their creativity. This is our mutual bond.

But elsewhere, children are sometimes viewed as adults on hold, empty vessels waiting to be filled, in training for adulthood. They have a sort of imaginary L plate attached to their back.

But upon closer inspection, the kind of close inspection that only a research project as profound as 5x5x5=creativity can provide, you get an altogether different picture; one that liberates the significant adult or adults from the mantle of expert and casts them more in the role of a companion embarking upon a new journey of discovery. And a salutary lesson for educators, artists and parents it is too. We all wear the L plates together – with pride!

As a cultural setting, the egg has absorbed many of the founding principles of the 5x5x5=creativity process and owes an element of its existence and continuing achievements to the pool of highly aware artists and educators that operate in the region.

As a parent, my daughter attends one of the first schools to take the 5x5x5=creativity principles to the heart of its processes. I am only too aware of how different her first experience of the British schooling system might have been had she attended another school, even another 'good' school. She is acutely aware of the creative forces at work in her and she believes that they are natural and essential – to both her and those around her. I owe this to her school. I, on the other hand, at the same age, had more or less written off my ability to be 'creative'.

The impact of 5x5x5=creativity, therefore, should not be underestimated.

Kate Cross  
Trustee  
Director, the egg theatre Bath

We have a responsibility as citizens and educationalists to share our sense of democracy, humanity, respect and tolerance. We can endeavour to do this by supporting children's rights and actively encouraging participation in a more creative education through social democracy, to empower learners to find creative ways through life's complexity. I find particularly compelling the contribution 5x5x5 makes, as it improves children's chances in education and life by focusing as much on developing their (and their families') social and cultural capital. This is vital to social mobility and a sense of life-long learning and wellbeing for all.

Iram Siraj-Blatchford

Patron

Professor of Early Childhood Education, Institute of Education

President of Early Education