

## **Creative Leadership: A Challenge of our Times**

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### **Background**

Learning is the core purpose of schools. These days: “If you can’t learn, unlearn and relearn, you’re lost because sustainable and continuous learning is a given of the twenty-first century”<sup>1</sup>. Every young person must be able to seize learning opportunities throughout life, to broaden her or his knowledge, skills and attitudes, and adapt to an increasingly changing, complex and interdependent world<sup>2</sup>. It isn’t surprising that learning to learn has been described as the key skill of the century<sup>3</sup>.

For most schools, this is a new agenda demanding significant change and continuous learning of teachers. Teachers are told they need to be ‘informed professionals’<sup>4</sup>. To achieve this, they need to work together in professional learning communities (PLCs) within and between schools<sup>5</sup>, building the capacity of their schools and generating new knowledge that will help enhance learning for all of their students.

Promoting new kinds of learning fundamentally depends on creativity. Lucas<sup>6</sup> describes creativity as:

*. . . a state of mind in which all of our intelligences are working together. It involves seeing, thinking and innovating. Creativity can be demonstrated in any subject at school or any aspect of life. Creative people question the assumptions they are given. They see the world differently, are happy to experiment, to take risks and to make mistakes.*

By contrast, ‘informed prescription’<sup>7</sup> in current initial teacher training and national improvement strategies in England can lead to dependency<sup>8</sup> and lack of creativity – “just show me what to do”.

The status quo is a very compelling state. So what might help promote the creativity needed for schools to be successful and children to achieve? We believe that this is a

fundamental challenge for school leadership. School leaders need to be able to unlock creativity in their staff in order to enhance learning. And to lead a creative school, you need creative leadership.

### **What is creative leadership?**

Creative leadership is an imaginative and thought through response to opportunities and to challenging issues that inhibit learning at all levels. It's about seeing, thinking and doing things differently in order to improve the life chances of all students. Creative leaders also provide the conditions, environment and opportunities for others to be creative.

Creative leadership is not just about problem solving ("seeing situations, finding better solutions to problems. . . Looking for solutions that aren't narrowly focused", LA leader); it also involves 'problem finding'<sup>9</sup> or identification<sup>10</sup>; actively scanning the environment for challenges which, if not addressed now, could derail improvement efforts or prevent schools from engaging in more radical change as they strive to prepare their students for the future. Often these might be seen as opportunities.

This was our conclusion after carrying out a research and development project (the Creative Leadership Learning Project) from September 2006 until February 2008. In this project, we explored how 11 school leadership teams (9 primary and 2 secondary) and a Local Authority (LA - school district) team in the south west of England approached creative leadership. Using a mixture of interviews, surveys, stimulus inputs from us and external experts, intersession and project tasks, journaling, networking and critical friendship, we helped them to explore and develop their capacity to create the conditions, culture and structures in which learning-focused creativity best thrives. In this paper, we draw on 208 baseline, mid-project and final interviews and surveys received from 274 members of staff in participating schools (43% of those distributed) to set out some of what we have learned, some serious questions and issues that arose during the project and our plans for future iterations.

When we started the project, there were no well-known definitions of creative leadership in education. We were aware of the Center for Creative Leadership in the United States, whose website defined creative leadership as "the capacity to think and act beyond the boundaries that limit our effectiveness"<sup>11</sup> but, from our searches, found no related educational research and very limited educational applications. We asked people "What

does creative leadership mean to you?". Fundamentally, they believed that creative leadership needs to make a positive difference: "It means looking at whatever type of way can lead a school to get the best out of the school and staff to get the best out of children" (Headteacher/principal); "There has to be a reason. It has to be raising achievement within the school" (Middle leader); "finding ways together of increasing our capacity, of sustaining good practice, of working with other leaders to find solutions" (Headteacher); "maximising potential as far as learning is concerned, and achievement at all levels" (Senior leader).

For many, creative leadership meant being outward-looking and more adventurous, looking and thinking 'outside the box', "finding new approaches to long-standing problems" (Middle leader), and doing things differently because: "no way is the one way. Every year things change" (Headteacher).

. . . the leadership needs to change with the climate. Keep what's firm and your beliefs and the ethos, but you build upon it and enhance it. Never being complacent . . . being prepared to learn how to do things better" (Middle leader).

The kind of leadership many described was one: "which thinks creatively about situations and the way forward, not just around a treadmill" (Teacher) and "taking steps that aren't necessarily the expected ones – to be adventurous" (Headteacher), but it also meant providing the culture and structures, including resources to help open up possibilities for thinking about things in different ways. This included being open-minded to new ideas, while: "not always chucking out the old and bringing in the new. Being sensible and getting a balance" (Teacher). It also requires spotting opportunities in legislation changes, looking for flexibilities to enable and exploit, as well as "not always following the party line" (Headteacher), being brave enough to take sensible risks: "risk taking without being risky" (LA adviser, attributed to a headteacher); encouraging people to be learners, to take supported risks" (Senior leader); and giving licence for others to be creative ("living it out and not compromising it - not reverting to type when there's a phone call from Ofsted" - LA adviser). Perhaps inevitably, issues of confidence and bravery to solve difficulties were also raised.

For a number of people, it represented a new form of leadership that isn't top-down: "leading a team in such a way that it's not dictating and yet still scaffolding and supporting" (Teacher). Some thought it was important that creative leadership be demonstrated at all levels of the community, including governors (school council members) and "dinner ladies on wet days": "It's about leading schools to empower

people to develop their own capacity in leading" (Headteacher); "letting people lead in different ways" (Senior leader); "Somebody being creative, coming up with ideas and being able to put them forward to the rest of the team, for the benefit of the school" (Teaching assistant). A few also talked about staff showing leadership in classrooms: "right across the curriculum, being creative in your delivery of lessons and finding new and exciting ways of learning to give students more interest" (Teaching assistant). Others felt that the initial energy and modeling of creative leadership needed to come from the top: "Our leadership team thinking of new ideas and designs and trying them out. Starting from there and working their way down" (Teaching assistant); "Once they [the senior leadership team] demonstrate it, everyone will take it on board". What appeared important was leading the school forward by looking at what the school needs, drawing on everyone's strengths, and coming to a shared vision and action to take that forward.

During the project each team was invited to develop its own 'project' as a focus for their creative leadership, giving us tangible exemplars of creative leadership in action. Briefly, projects fell into three broad categories:

1. Curriculum innovation - developing different approaches to specific areas of the curriculum for identified groups of pupils eg maths for girls, or completely overhauling their approach eg rethinking their offer to children by concentrating on the skills they would need to be successful in the world into which they will graduate from education.
2. Internal and/or external capacity building - seeking to improve the collaborative capacity of their organisation either by developing the skills of individuals within it eg through coaching with different groups of staff, or creating time for deeper learning, or extending the reach and appeal of their organisation to involve people from 'outside' in new ways, especially parents and governors (school board members).
3. Extending the use of data and evidence - projects focused on new ways of pupil tracking and data sharing across, in one case, a large secondary school.

### **What are the conditions for creative leadership?**

Our experience suggests that while some people are, instinctively, creative leaders, creative leadership can be enhanced. In designing the project, we included sessions

and activities deliberately intended to take the participants out of their comfort zones e.g. intervisitations between schools where a secondary school leadership team visited an infant school (children aged 5-7), considering the adequacy of current education for future challenges ("Enjoyed this as it gave opportunities to extend thinking and go beyond the boundaries. This is important for schools, we are too often restricted to think of the here and now", Headteacher), thinking about their school's model of learning, boundary breaking leadership<sup>12</sup>, composing music etc. All of the sessions were facilitated by stimulating presenters who challenged the participants with new ideas.

Providing time away from the busy daily activity of schools also proved valuable, both in bringing senior leadership teams closer together and in providing the space for them to think more creatively about issues they face: "Lots of other initiatives have happened as a result of having time to discuss things as a senior leadership team and the new ideas and stimulating discussion of the CLL project" (Senior leader).

The baseline survey highlighted significant differences between schools in their professional learning communities<sup>13</sup>, most notably in the perceptions about feeling valued, levels of trust, extent of collective responsibility for all pupils' learning, whether professional learning was a priority, and organisation of structures (time, space etc) to enable staff to learn and work together. Subsequent work with the schools, and interviews throughout the project, highlighted that where these issues were not attended to, they got in the way of successful creative leadership. In particular, where staff did not feel trusted or valued by leaders, they were unwilling to take risks. As Sprenger<sup>14</sup> notes, without horizontal trust between staff, transfer of knowledge doesn't occur, while vertical trust between staff and senior leaders is required for people to be willing to take risks. We view professional learning community as providing an essential infrastructure for creative leadership.

### **Emerging conditions for promoting and nurturing the creativity of colleagues**

A key aim of the project was to help senior leadership teams in schools and the LA officer team to explore and develop their capacity to create the conditions, culture and structures in which learning-focused innovation and creativity best thrive. Through our research, we have identified nine conditions that creative leaders appear to need to work towards in their school to promote and nurture creativity in others. This set of conditions works more like a recipe than a menu, listing ingredients which, in

combination, are likely to produce the desired effect. During the final retreat, we tested out these conditions with the leadership teams involved in the project.

Our evidence suggests that to promote and nurture the creativity of colleagues, school leaders need to:

- *Model creativity and risk taking*

One of the most powerful ways leaders can lead others' learning and development is through modelling. Other staff are unlikely to take risks experimenting with new ideas if they constantly see senior leaders being cautious. They need to know that it's acceptable to act in this way; that this is a norm. This came through strongly in interviews with headteachers and other senior leaders: "Model practice, even in risk taking" (Senior leader); "You have more credibility if you show you can do it. You have to be doing it yourself. They won't feel so worried about having a go and would feel more enthusiastic" (Senior leader). We also heard this from their colleagues: "They do it themselves; they lead by example" (Support staff); "They role model it. They intentionally lead in that direction and value it" (Teacher) and from LA advisers: "Senior leaders have to be role models, advocates, so they see them living it out and not compromising it. If there's a phone call from Ofsted<sup>15</sup>, they don't revert to type".

- *Stimulate a sense of urgency - if necessary, generate a 'crisis'!*

Learning occurs as a result of dissonance; when new ideas or situations don't fit with current beliefs or ways of working. When this dissonance becomes uncomfortable, it creates a sense of urgency that something needs to be done; that 'the way we do things' needs to be changed. If this is supported by positive conditions, productive activity can ensue<sup>16</sup>. Problem solving was frequently described as the stimulus for creativity: "Quite often we have to solve problems and challenges and have to think creatively. How are we going to solve this staffing issue, and school improvement and making it work rather than it being done to us" (Headteacher); "if something is a challenge, difficult, you need to think about the different avenues" (Senior leader); "I become creative when something's not working, for example something new, and you see limited impact. I say 'this isn't working; there has to be another way'" (LA leader).

Our suggestion we might label this 'generate a crisis' received mixed reactions. Some found it too extreme, provoking a feeling of reassurance when, as we highlight below, psychological 'space' is important to generate creativity. Others we spoke to during the project and subsequently pointed out that it often takes a crisis to promote action where there is inertia. We are not suggesting that the project schools were places of inertia;

rather, the point is to emphasise that creativity is not always stimulated from within individuals, as these interviewees concurred: "You need staff willing to take risks and do things differently. It's the same as with children; some like routine" (Senior leader); "Lots of people don't like change so they want to reassure themselves by doing the same things" (Teacher); "It's easy to use the same plans and it's nice and safe. But I don't think being creative goes in with being safe" (Teacher).

- *Expose colleagues to new thinking and experiences*

Creativity is stimulated in an environment full of new ideas and experiences<sup>17</sup>. The more exposed people are to ideas and others who think differently, and the more opportunities they have to think through new ways of approaching work, the more adventurous they tend to become. Bringing in new ideas is essential life blood in schools: "some [teachers] would like to change but don't know where to go for ideas, which is a reflection on the management team" (Teacher); "They [teachers] may get stuck in a kind of routine monotony and don't feel they're encouraged to break out of that" (Teacher)". Some schools consciously fed in new ideas on a regular basis: "the opportunity to consider new ideas as a matter of course (Deputy head); "making them aware of different ways of doing things, day to day in small ways rather than feeling overwhelmed that they must totally change" (Senior leader). Given many people's natural comfort with routine, at times this requires taking them out of their comfort zones; forcing them to push the boundaries of their thinking about what's possible. It may also mean swimming against the tide: "The whole education system is quite prescribed. We do this 'unwritten'" (Teacher).

- *Self consciously relinquish control*

Schools can feel like places of control where staff think they are being watched, both by senior leaders and external bodies. This can apply to schools in all contexts: "High achieving schools carry the weight of parents' expectations, and in underachieving schools people want your data to look better" (Deputy head). Asking what might inhibit teachers who don't experiment and innovate in their work, some responded that their creativity would be inhibited if they felt they were 'being checked on': "They may not feel they can try anything new because the school is too rigid and it's all about results so maybe they feel constricted" (Senior leader); "Management pressures from government, the local authority and heads, and though we try not to, I'm sure that's an element of that. We need to give messages that it's OK" (Headteacher); "Freedom. It depends on the school you are in. My previous school . . . was very set in its ways. You couldn't go off and do things differently. Here, everyone is a lot more willing. It's not so tied to restrictions" (Teacher).

Fear of letting colleagues, pupils and parents down is an issue. Those in more senior roles appeared to feel greater autonomy in relation to taking risks, suggesting that other colleagues may need more encouragement to take risks, to know that 'it's OK to make mistakes'. Working with challenging issues of school improvement, as one LA adviser explained, can suppress a lot of natural creativity, but: "I don't want colleagues to feel it". We heard about "situations [in different schools] where if the headteacher comes in, I will be in trouble" (Teacher). This condition is about creating an ethos that it's acceptable to take risks, and being given the freedom to explore without constraints. If staff don't have opportunities to experiment and step out of the boundaries, "they stick rigidly to what they know" (Teacher). Many people seemed to feel a need for what one teacher described as "a license to think creatively".

This also relates to the issue of trust discussed earlier, and feeling valued: "Being comfortable with each other and able to speak your mind without being shot down in flames. Knowing your opinion is valued even when it's not shared. Giving people leeway to explore new ideas. Letting them know they can try things out without being slated so long as there is a period of reflection after they have done that" (Senior leader); "We're a mixed team. It's about trying to set the atmosphere where it's not just me in charge; they've got just as much contribution" (Senior leader).

- *Provide time and space and facilitate the practicalities*

Creative thinking is facilitated by time and the mental space for ideas to evolve and be fleshed out. Interestingly, we found that some pressure of time seemed to be important for creating the sense of urgency which concentrates energy and effort. This may mean setting deadlines. But this needs to be balanced with allowing enough time and space for creative possibilities to emerge: "Having a clear head makes for what you want" (Headteacher); "I need to be in a good mood. Flexible. We can become less creative when we get stuck in what we're doing in structures and tests and so on. Picking up on all the positives rather than taking any negatives. Go with the flow. You need to be willing to let go and push whatever is naturally occurring" (Teacher). Different kinds of challenges, therefore, need different deadlines. Setting targets, however, is not an effective way to promote staff creativity. Targets seem to promote linear thinking and an outcomes-oriented approach. By leaving the end result ambiguous space is left for people to envision the possibilities and the scope of their imaginations isn't limited: "[I am at my most creative] When I'm given space to be able to try things out and take risks. And when there isn't a pressure to have a set achievement at the end of it" (Teacher); "Sometimes you can set time aside to be creative but mostly its when I feel more relaxed and comfortable with the immediate environment" (Teacher).

The physical environment also enhances some people's creative processes. We heard of how they become creative when going for a run, driving through countryside, in brightly decorated rooms at school: "Being here in this school inspires me and keeps you going. . . . The atmosphere and vibrancy of the school and colourful classrooms (Senior leader) and: "At home. I find that inspiring - a huge window to look over Bristol Gorge, and a big light room" (Middle Leader).

Creating time and space are practicalities that can be facilitated. One secondary school spent the equivalent of hiring four teachers a year on 'lead practitioners' who could provide colleagues with time and space to explore creative work: "You need to have time to think about what you're doing, and if you need support, you need to know who you can ask for support and advice" (Senior leader). Using peer coaching was also suggested as a means of promoting new practices when colleagues came out of their classrooms and saw other colleagues' practice. Several schools also used different teaming arrangements to support sharing.

- *Promote individual and collaborative creative thinking and design*

It seems necessary to create opportunities for both individual thought and for collaboration. The stimulation of other colleagues was necessary for a considerable number of teachers: "I think when I have people to bounce ideas off. When you're working with someone else and someone else introduces ideas" (Teacher); "Working with someone closely is really important 'cause it means you can share ideas – you can build on each other's ideas. It really works" (Teacher); "When I am being stimulated and challenged by other people – that fires me up. Two or three heads are even better than one and I do need fuelling. I don't jump out of bed and then be creative" (Deputy head). Many people, however, reflected that they needed a combination of time alone and time with colleagues to 'spark' and share ideas: "You can be creative alone for so much of the time but eventually you need other people so your thinking isn't off beam" (LA adviser); "When I'm on my own but after the hurly burly of discussion about a stimulus or a problem, that's when I come up with a solution" (Headteacher); "Being on my own and having space, but a lot of ideas come from bouncing off other people" (Headteacher). Quiet time often appeared to be associated with home, perhaps because it is so hard to find space in the daily pressures of school.

- *Set high expectations about the degree of creativity*

Promoting and valuing innovation are critical to unlocking creative practice. We found that, often, starting to think creatively bred a desire for greater creativity. The mind shift

often came from the top of the school, where a passionate interest in how learning and teaching could be different helped spawn a culture that expected people to think differently about learning and teaching. Many examples were offered from colleagues about how the challenge of child-centred and personalised learning had stimulated them to be more creative in how they thought about their teaching practice and also some hopes that possible curriculum change at a national level will provide much needed support for people's high expectations about the potential of creativity, even though it will require significant effort: "There is that feeling that we're going to be able to break free across schools. It'll be like a butterfly—more beautiful—and more creative but it will be more hard work" (Deputy head).

Confidence was seen by many as a prerequisite and gaining 'permission' from senior leaders as important. Several senior leaders told us that it was necessary to build colleagues' confidence: "Give them confidence to have a go. Share what you're doing, including times when it hasn't gone well and what to do about it. It can look as though it's all going smoothly, but for them to know that that's OK and you can get it back again. If there's a curriculum area that they don't know much about you can help them and make it easy for them to take a risk. It's all about confidence and permission" (Senior leader); "We are now more confident to step out. We do work more collaboratively now. We work with colleagues collaboratively" (Headteacher).

A number of people, however, relished the positive challenge connected with creativity: "Not being satisfied with things being enough. Anyone can deliver the lesson to the children but wanting to get the most out of it as possible pushes me to be the most creative" (Teacher); "I love being challenged in my thinking. . . I am stimulated by 'have you thought about'?" (LA adviser); "When it's something I'm very excited about doing, I feel inspired to learn more. If I'm teaching, I gather resources and then have a go. It's nice if it's something new rather than always the same" (Senior leader); "I love an environment where more than acceptable to do unusual, exciting things" (Senior leader). By setting the bar high and pushing people to be imaginative and to think originally, leaders appear to create a bigger space for colleagues to grow into.

- *Use failure as a learning opportunity*

People worry a great deal about what they perceive as serious (the greatest) risks associated with experimenting with their practice. These turn out to be low risks long term, for example, the pupils not learning what they're supposed to in one lesson. By valuing the things that go wrong, there is an opportunity to neutralise at least the fear of

censure that teachers say they imagine would follow such failure, and to challenge their beliefs that such failure constitutes a serious risk: "From top down . . . people will try it. If it doesn't work we can learn from it" (Teacher); "In an environment where . . . you can fail and say 'no, this doesn't really work', make decisions for yourself and won't be pulled in different direction", (Teacher); "to have the freedom to explore, to take risks to make mistakes and learn from them" (LA adviser).

Ensuring that people are supportive of experimentation, therefore, matters: "You need to feel you can have a go, so the environment is important, knowing people won't laugh, and it's OK if you don't get right first time", (Senior leader). Mitigating the worst effects by being able to put right any mistakes that ensue is also important.

- *Keep referring back to core values*

While the possibilities of creative thinking and the inspiration it seems to provide many people can be exciting, staying close to core values appears to provide a bedrock for development. Being clear and explicit about values and holding them in steady state offered a context and stable point of reference for people: "If there's ever a time when you feel that things have run flat or drifted, I find that pulling myself back towards core values and vision helps" (Deputy head); "Nothing is ever straightforward. We need to think a bit more widely about the issues. There's always a knock on. We have to think about the best possible solution but keeping still the values we believe in" (Headteacher); "You need to be secure in your knowledge of what's already there and where you want to be" (Deputy head); "Knowing that everyone is moving towards the same goals and vision keep you going too" (Senior leader).

### **What are some questions and issues arising from the project?**

A recurrent theme in this project has been *practitioners' attitudes to risk*. Schools are high stakes environments, with children's learning being the 'chips' with which practitioners feel they are gambling, if and when they introduce changes into their practice. In our interviews, in answer to the question "what's the biggest risk that teachers take when they innovate in their practice?" most responded with a variation on "we won't cover the curriculum" or "the children won't understand this learning point." What was interesting was that on hearing themselves say this, many respondents moved quickly to moderate or qualify their first reply. They noticed that the risk that felt to them to be "the biggest" was actually relatively unimportant, and that any possible outcomes were easily rectified. So we think that the psychology of risk taking in teaching

and educational leadership might be an important part of the piece and, therefore, an interdisciplinary approach may be necessary to get to the bottom of how practitioners calculate risk and the role of, for instance, fear and anxiety in that.

Problems of *evaluating the impact of creative leadership* go beyond the usual methodological challenges. They are intricately bound up in complex notions of value that are central to an understanding of creativity and its contribution to learning<sup>18</sup>. Creative leadership, as we have seen, is a disciplined process, planned for and purposeful, and geared towards engendering creativity in colleagues in order to enhance creative learning opportunities for children. The question we are asking is, is it sufficient to evaluate the extent to which creativity in colleagues is increased or enhanced, or should we focus on the ultimate 'outcome of value' that creative colleagues generate through their practice i.e. improvements in children's learning? Is creativity in colleagues of value in itself? And if it is, what measures can we use to assess creative leadership and its effects? Through our interviews, we generated impact outcomes at a number of levels (senior leadership team, teachers, whole school, pupils and Local Authority), and at our final residential session, asked the teams to select the outcomes they most value and evaluate the extent to which they have been achieved, citing evidence. This means each team's outcomes are different, according to their context. So, for example, while one team has sought impact at the SLT level in the areas of openness, motivation and ownership, another has highlighted relationships, high aspirations, capacity to solve problems and confidence.

There remains for us a question about what are the most *conducive social conditions for school leaders to 'be creative'*? In our interviews we asked several variants of the question, "when are you at your most creative?" As we noted above, three categories of responses emerged; those who needed space and quiet to be creative, those who needed the ebb and flow of conversation and ideas in a group setting to be creative, and those who needed both quiet time alone and then together time to check out and refine their ideas. In an environment where collaboration is both difficult to facilitate and essential for effective professional learning to take place, the additional need for the stimulation of engagement with colleagues for the generation of ideas adds weight to an already powerful argument. However, the value of individual reflection in this process cannot be ignored and so the question becomes, where is the balance? How much time can and should school leaders spend in individual reflection and how much in collaborative working arrangements with their colleagues.

We also want to raise a question about *context*. If an idea or approach is new to a school leadership team in its context but already known in other locations, can their generation of that idea and its implementation be an example of creative leadership? In other words, does the idea or practice have to be original and new everywhere to qualify? Our sense is that the answer to the question is yes; that school leadership team is demonstrating creative leadership. By generating a new solution or a new opportunity in their context, they are, by definition, being creative; they are creating something new *for them* and for their school. We make this assertion on the basis that all the intellectual and emotional processes surrounding the introduction of the new idea will be experienced by the school leadership team and their colleagues regardless of whether they are the first or the fifty first group to come up with the idea.

Finally, we are wondering just how creative actions need to be to be accepted as 'creative'. It is acknowledged that there are different levels of innovation. Innovation can be incremental, radical or, in the case of whole systems, transformative<sup>19</sup>. Incremental innovation is small scale, involving minor adaptations, the "tinkering" that underpins much change in teachers' practice<sup>20</sup> or "tweaking" that involves "making *small but significant changes* rather than a complete overhaul"<sup>21</sup>, an "easy does it" type approach<sup>22</sup>.

Radical innovation, by contrast is much bolder, involving "fundamentally new ways" of doing things<sup>23</sup>, including a radical rethink of practice. Almost three quarters of the respondents to our baseline survey agreed with the statement 'Staff experiment and innovate in their work'. When we asked interviewees what they thought this meant, they generally saw this as small changes that people make all the time to their practice: "Within the classroom and what you're teaching and the different ideas you come up with for different lessons so you try stuff and see if it works" (Teacher); "They change the way they do something—a new way of doing it—part of their practice . . . It's probably smaller and often" (Teacher). But some questioned how creative this really was: "I think I innovate. I try new approaches. We always try new things as a teacher. Is that really being creative and innovative? I needed to do something for our weekly challenge and it worked really well but then it got stale so I had to rethink. I guess that's what it means" (Teacher); "I see innovation and experience as quite radical so I'm surprised they think they do it. I think their interpretation is tinkering to make more fun" (LA adviser); Small change, however, might lead to a significant impact, as a number pointed out: "something you do in your classroom that's quite small can have a big impact" (Middle leader); "what outwardly may not look like a change could fundamentally transform the class" (Headteacher).

### **What are the challenges/next steps?**

Bringing about deep and meaningful change to learning practices is one of school leadership's greatest challenges. Leading for change is rooted in current reality, at the same time as dealing with the future<sup>24</sup>. Leaders have to be aware of societal and global changes and trends, and have visions and ideas of their preferred learning futures<sup>25</sup>. However, politicians, the media and the wider community have their own conceptions about education's purposes and how schools can best improve. These ideas often produce tensions for leaders, between what *they* believe is important to prepare pupils for the future and what external agents expect them to do and, frequently, judge them on. A couple of the project schools have experienced the 'paralysis' that an impending visit from the Office for Standards in Education inspectors often produces<sup>26</sup>; where creative responses are seen as too great a risk until the inspectors have left.

We have been considering the implications of repeating the project, working with more secondary schools than primary and including some schools in challenging circumstances<sup>27</sup>. This requires us to think about what, if anything, would need to be different in this iteration for a significantly different configuration of schools. For instance, are teachers in schools that are struggling to make the grade more or less likely to take risks with their practice? Are school leaders more or less likely to try fresh approaches when all else has failed? What is the balance between creative leadership that is stimulated by external opportunities versus that which is in response to particular problems? What is the role of Local Authority advisers in encouraging and facilitating creative leadership in these circumstances?

There is also considerable evidence that building a professional learning community; a precondition for creative leadership, may be considerably more difficult in a secondary school. The combination of the community simply being larger, with its tendency to compartmentalise along departmental and subject lines, presents a significant challenge to building trust and common cause between colleagues.

We will be continuing to explore creative leadership and the questions and issues it raises.

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