

## **20. Creative Learning Assessment (CLA): a framework for developing and assessing children's creative learning**

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### **Abstract**

*When the research team at CLPE set out to develop an assessment focusing on creative learning, initially with a focus on the creative arts, we were aware of the controversial and complex nature of the task. Creativity is a slippery concept to pin down. Attempts to assess it are seen by some as impossible, counterproductive and unwise. It is difficult to assess any complex learning, but assessing 'creative learning' is particularly challenging: if creativity involves originality and the use of the individual imagination, how can these qualities be judged against a set of predetermined criteria? Creative learning is multidimensional. It challenges established thinking and practice in assessment, requiring a creative solution. Working with teachers from a group of schools in inner-city London, we found that it is both possible and desirable to assess creative work and creative learning in order to promote it. This paper describes the elements and impact of the Creative Learning Assessment (CLA) as a means of evidencing and enabling children's creative learning.*

## Introduction

What is creativity? Is it more helpful to think in terms of 'creative learning and is this distinct from other kinds of learning? How can we help teachers to describe and evaluate the complexity of children's progress as creative learners and are there common threads which link creative learning across subjects? Should we be attempting to assess creativity at all? Do we risk losing it if we do? These are questions that need to be considered in any attempt to measure children's creative achievement.

The development of the CLA was the response to a request from a group of primary school head teachers who needed a way to systematically observe, describe and evaluate children's creative learning in their schools. They believed that by focusing assessment on creative learning they could more fully represent pupils' progress to colleagues, parents, governors, and inspectors and, by doing so, demonstrate the benefits of a curriculum that encouraged children's creativity. The Lambeth head teachers had also asked for some means of relating achievement in creative learning to progress in academic areas. We aimed to provide them with ways of assessing literacy which would be compatible with their assessments of creative learning.

The CLA research project, developed in collaboration with Lambeth EAZ/CLC schools, aimed to provide teachers with a view of creative learning and development, a framework for observation-based assessment, and information to feedback into planning a creative curriculum which would be responsive to individual and group needs. It was an opportunity for a group of researchers at CLPE (Sue Ellis, Myra Barrs and Jane Bunting) to work in partnership with a group of interested schools, many of them in areas of social deprivation, willing to give time and support to an extended development project to provide an innovative and workable solution to a real and complex problem.

The initiative was helped by a changing context of government initiatives and welcome statements on creativity (Robinson 1999, DCMS 2002, DFES 2003, 2005, Ofsted 2003, QCA 2000) which provided a opportunity for the valuing of creative and arts learning. This had long been submerged by a curriculum and pedagogy dominated by the core subjects and their assessment by high-stakes, standardised testing. However, creativity represents a precious area of freedom within the curriculum and there was an understandable desire to protect it from attempts at measurement, particularly when there was a shared perception that assessment often leads to a narrowed curriculum and view of the learner.

We wanted to develop a model of assessment that opened up possibilities to learners, informed teachers about the creative learning process, and encouraged them to be creative and reflective practitioners (Schon, 1987) in developing a curricu-

lum and pedagogy that placed creativity at the centre. CLPE had an established track record in teacher assessment of language, literacy and learning (CLPE 1988, 1990, 1993, 2007), and we were well aware that assessment influences practice and creates backwash into the curriculum (Barrs, 1990). In developing the Creative Learning Assessment (CLA), we were concerned to create a positive backwash, influencing teaching and learning in constructive and supportive ways. Using an informing assessment structure, we believed, would help teachers to focus both on ways of analysing, and opportunities for developing, children's creative work in schools.

## **What are we measuring?**

To assess creative learning we needed to evolve and develop a shared understanding of what we thought it was. An explicit description would help teachers to notice and record the different kinds of learning within a 'creative spectrum'. Our model of assessment also needed to reflect the complexity of creative learning and enable teachers to look closely at the whole of children's creative learning: both the *process* and the end *products* of their activity.

### ***The CLA continuum***

The CLA Creative Learning Continuum, with cross-curricular and cross-age dimensions of learning, proved a clear, informing and open structure for reflecting on progress. Based on CLPE's Patterns of Learning continuum (1990), it comprised:

- (i) confidence, independence and enjoyment
- (ii) collaboration and communication
- (iii) creativity
- (iv) strategies and skills
- (v) knowledge and understanding
- (vi) reflection and evaluation.

### ***The CLA observation framework***

The interdependent and non-hierarchical strands of the continuum form the key headings within the CLA observation framework which, together with examples, help guide teacher observation and reflection on the creative learning process. They are not exhaustive, but indicative, and provide useful prompts for observation and analysis. Teachers responded positively to these descriptions, finding them recognisable and helpful.

**TABLE 1: THE CREATIVE LEARNING OBSERVATION FRAMEWORK**

| Teacher/TA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Year | Date | Date | Date |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Name(s)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |      |      |      |      |
| Creative context                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |      |      |      |      |
| (i) confidence, independence, enjoyment, e.g.<br>developing pleasure and enjoyment<br>engagement and focus<br>empathy and emotional involvement<br>self-motivation                                                                         |      |      |      |      |
| (ii) collaboration and communication, e.g.<br>works effectively in a team<br>contributes to discussion, makes suggestions<br>listens and responds to others<br>perseveres, overcomes problems<br>communicates and presents ideas           |      |      |      |      |
| (iii) creativity, e.g.<br>is imaginative and playful<br>generates ideas, questions and makes connections<br>risk-takes and experiments<br>expresses own creative ideas using a range of artistic elements                                  |      |      |      |      |
| (iv) strategies and skills, e.g.<br>identifies issues and explores options<br>plans and develops a project<br>demonstrates a growing range of artistic/creative skills<br>uses appropriate subject specific skills with increasing control |      |      |      |      |
| (v) knowledge and understanding, e.g.<br>awareness of different forms, styles, artistic and cultural traditions, creative techniques<br>uses subject specific knowledge and language with understanding                                    |      |      |      |      |
| (vi) reflection and evaluation, e.g.<br>responds to and comments on own and others' work<br>responds to artistic/creative experiences<br>analyses and constructively criticises work<br>reviews and evaluates own progress                 |      |      |      |      |
| Areas for further development                                                                                                                                                                                                              |      |      |      |      |

The CLA observation framework allows teachers space to record what they are noticing while children are working on a creative project. It asks questions like: 'In what ways are children able to take risks and experiment in their learning?', 'Do they generate ideas, questions and make connections?', 'Are there examples of responding to and commenting on their own and other people's work?'

Teachers found the open framework flexible yet supportive in helping them to look closely at how children were learning in different arts subjects (classroom projects included the visual arts, animation, drama, dance, technology, history and literature). They saw it as an opportunity to find out what children know and can do, and as a way of developing a deeper knowledge and understanding of individuals and their approaches to learning.

Prompts for observation can be seen in Table 1 which shows the 'creative observation framework that the teachers used'.

The significant role of reflection (Black, 2004) was highlighted by teachers as a part of the process. Through using the CLA framework, teachers decided to create specific time and emphasis within the curriculum for children's self-reflection and peer evaluation, and drew on portfolios of work as a rich source of evidence to focus children's discussion about their creative learning and work. Portfolios and e.portfolios (Barrett, 2000), together with the CLA observation framework and a scale of progress (see Figure 2), created a powerful element within the model of assessment. They provided a record of children's work, both process and product, and included multimedia evidence.

Whilst many elements within these headings are generic, we recognise that for the 'Strategies and skills' and 'Knowledge and understanding' strands, there are also subject-specific elements that teachers need to consider in addition to the generic features described. One teacher using the CLA commented:

*The framework helps you to view children's learning through a different lens: 'the doing', listening to them as it happens, and the product 'the done'. It's a more balanced approach than just assessing the outcome. You learn so much more about the child that you can use to help them move forward.* Teacher BL

## ***The CLA Scale***

The CLA Scale provides teachers with a view of progress and development, and suggests ways they can support development. It shows, for example, children progressing across the scale to become more conscious, deliberate and critically reflective in their experimenting.

The CLA Scale provides a tool for summative assessment. The five point scale is used by teachers at the end of the year to arrive at judgements of progress, drawing on the range of observation, portfolio and e.portfolio evidence gathered. The moderation process (Hallam, 2000) gives added validity to their judgements and in successive moderations resulted in a very high level of agreement by teacher moderators (CLPE, 2007):

*The moderation process was confirming. I felt more confident about my judgements afterwards.* Teacher NF

*It made you appreciate other people's observations — how accurate observations that were related to the elements of the scale could record and convey to others a clear picture of a child's progress.* Teacher AC

| Creative Learning Scale                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Date | Class | Year | School |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|------|--------|
| <p><b>Level 1</b><br/>Children play with creative materials and elements and use them to express feelings and ideas. They practise simple skills, exploring possibilities. Children begin to recognise and describe some creative effects. They describe what they think and feel about their own and others' work.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |      |       |      |        |
| <p><b>Level 2</b><br/>Children develop their imagination, exploring and investigating the possibilities within a creative medium. They choose different elements to create different effects. They expand their range of skills and begin to draw on and vary their use in appropriate ways. Children recognise that different elements and processes are involved in a creative work. They comment on differences in their own and others' work and suggest ways of improving it.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                     |      |       |      |        |
| <p><b>Level 3</b><br/>Children work with increasing personal involvement, independence and creativity. They communicate ideas through a particular art form, combining different elements and using them expressively in a creative work. They select and use skills and techniques appropriately with growing control. Children discuss the way meanings can be conveyed in a particular medium. They identify similarities and differences between their own and others' work, commenting on intended effects. They adapt and improve their own work.</p>                                                                                                                                |      |       |      |        |
| <p><b>Level 4</b><br/>Children develop creativity and imagination through engaging in increasingly complex artistic projects. They organise different elements, techniques and processes to realise their ideas and intentions in a particular art form. They consolidate a growing range of skills and use them with increasing precision and control. Children discuss the ideas and approaches in creative work, relating it to context. They evaluate and develop their work, commenting on how their intentions have been achieved.</p>                                                                                                                                               |      |       |      |        |
| <p><b>Level 5</b><br/>Children are increasingly conscious of the imaginative possibilities in a particular creative medium. They select and organise their material to express their ideas and intentions, making choices for different purposes and to create different effects. They use skills with precision, control and fluency, combining them appropriately and effectively. Children analyse how meanings are conveyed, with increasing critical awareness, drawing on their knowledge and understanding of an art form and using appropriate vocabulary. They reflect on their learning and show awareness of purpose and context in refining and developing their own work.</p> |      |       |      |        |

(taken from NC PoS; Arts for PE/Dance, Music, Art, English/Drama, D&T

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Figure 1: CLA scales

During the year-long pilot, the revised CLA was road-tested thoroughly in real time, in real classrooms, in a range of primary schools, with teachers informing revisions along the way and helping to shape the final instrument. It was important that we developed a manageable assessment tool that could be readily taken on by other teachers. Pilot teachers were interviewed about the impact of the CLA on their practice:

*I could see what I was aiming for. It drew my attention to the different 'parts' of creativity. The scale has made me more aware of planning time for reflection, evaluation and commenting on others' work.* Teacher KS

## Positive impacts of assessing creative learning using the CLA

Our findings from the project showed that the CLA provided a valuable and practical tool for assessing and extending creative learning in classrooms. For example:

### Assessment

Teachers found the CLA both manageable and informative. The clear structure of the observation headings enabled them to quickly internalise the criteria and use them to 'notice' and support the learning of each child in their class from a more knowledgeable perspective. Focusing on a few children informed their observation of all children and fed directly into their planning. The observation process had powerful effects on teachers who had experienced didactic training or practice and recognised they had lost focus on individual children's learning in favour of transmission teaching and a delivery approach to the curriculum. Teachers recognised the elements of creativity described in the CLA framework and scale, and used these to observe, assess and develop children's creative learning.

*The drama sessions were videoed and the difference between the first and third sessions were fascinating, from a riot of noise and movement to cathedral-like silence as children watched each other move with poise and expression. Following this, children's writing became far more expansive and vivid. It was drama that supported them in writing more powerfully and convincingly, from inside the text.* Teacher BL

### Creative learning and achievement

The development of a more negotiated, workshop/atelier model enabled children to work with more autonomy, making more choices and decisions and generating more productive talk and discussion. The focus on creative learning showed that creative contexts empower children who are not revealed as 'achieving' in academic subjects

or through current testing systems. Reflection and evaluation was key in promoting children's critical reflection on their own and others' work. 'Reflective time' encouraged children to review their own learning and teachers recognised the need to build into the curriculum time for reflection.

*I like being allowed to choose what we make because then everyone does different things. Jess, age 7*

## **Pedagogy**

The CLA had a distinct effect on pedagogy, which moved from a more didactic, delivered curriculum to one that was negotiated and collaborative. This contributed to better relationships within the class. By closely observing children, teachers reorientated their teaching to focus on individual children's learning experience and this helped them to move children on. Teachers felt supported in their planning and provision and developed a more reflective practice. The clear model of creative learning supported the explicit discussion of the creative process with children, enabling children to better understand what they needed to do.

## **Teacher knowledge**

Though considered a difficult area to define and pin down (Craft 2005, Craft, Burnard and Grainger, 2005), the moderation process showed that teachers recognised the *elements of creativity* described in the CLA framework. The explicit headings for observation and descriptions of progress in the scale enhanced teachers' knowledge of the different aspects of creative learning, promoting understanding of creative learning development for individual teachers and across the whole school.

*The framework helped me to look at how children were learning An understanding of creative learning gave rigour to my practice. Teacher MH*

## **Curriculum change**

Teachers' observations demonstrated that children need time, space and a more integrated curriculum to make the important connections necessary to make real progress as learners. They saw the value of reflective time and created regular, planned opportunities for this. Teachers recognised that the model of learning transfers across other curriculum areas. The focus on creative learning enabled teachers to see the links with the rest of children's learning where, for example, risk-taking, making choices, reflection and persistence transfer across subjects.

*The CLA provided me with a clear framework for thinking about what I needed to build into my planning. Teacher BL*

## Assessing Learning in Creative Contexts Project Research Findings: The impact of the Creative Learning Assessment (CLA)



Figure 2: The impact of the Creative Learning assessment (CLA)

## Implications of measuring creativity

Our experience of developing the CLA leads us to believe that measuring creativity provides a real opportunity to create a shift in our vision of education for the 21st century. It is a portal for change in the way we view:

- *the learner* as an active participant, who is experimental and critically reflective;
- *the role of the teacher* and other partners in schools, creating a culture of shared enquiry;
- *the curriculum*, as more integrated, dynamic and inclusive; and
- *assessment* as a means of recognising and valuing the diversity of talents.

Assessing creativity is an ally in the process of transforming education as a creative enterprise. It is an important means by which we can make visible the impact of creative teaching on children's willingness and ability to take creative leaps in their learning:

*Without some form of assessment and evaluation the teacher cannot know what the consequences of teaching have been. Not to know, or at least not to try to know, is professionally irresponsible. And to claim that such consequences cannot in principle be known is to ask people to support educational programs on faith. (Eisner, 2000)*

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