**Creativity within the Foundation Phase Curriculum: a risky business?**

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**Biographical note**

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**Abstract**

Whilst creative behaviours are viewed as twenty-first-century competencies (Davies *et al.,* 2017), understandings within education remain vague (Prentice, 2000; Giménez, 2016). Through a focus on two Welsh primary headteachers, this paper illuminate two contrasting constructions of school based creativity and considers associated pedagogical practices

Whilst the creativity literature foregrounds child agency within risk-taking environments (Grainger and Barnes, 2006), analysis of the first setting suggests that the privileging of accountability to external markers may lead to risk-aversion as creativity is shaped through a ‘policy panopticon’ (Ball, 1999).

A shift from traditional arts based views of creativity towards an emphasis upon creative behaviours may be advantageous and a reconstruction of accountability as starting at the micro level of the *child*. Whilst the post-Donaldson zeitgeist offers hope, this may still be challenging where high stakes assessments remain. These tensions are significant to practitioners since implicit understandings of ‘creativity’ impact on the pedagogies offered to children.

**Key words**

creativity, creative behaviours, risk-taking, accountability, child-agency, Early years, Foundation Phase Curriculum

**Introduction**

Whilst it is difficult to pinpoint the skills necessary for the future world of work, it is reasoned that children need to be pliable and flexible problem solvers, able to adapt to whatever is necessitated by unpredictable rapid technological advances (Azzam, 2009; Robinson, 2011). From this perspective, an emphasis upon creativity is advocated within the fields of early years and primary education (Duffy, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford, 2007). However, Prentice (2000, 145) notes the elusive nature of the term creativity, maintaining that it is a ‘slippery concept’ with ‘multiple meanings’ Sharing this view, other academics have argued that it is often contestable, vague and intangible ( Burnard *et al.,* 2006; Brundrett, 2004). Runco (2008, 96) defines creativity as “thinking or problem solving that involves the construction of new meaning”. The NACCCE explanation, holds congruence with this “Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value” (1999, 29). Rinaldi’s (2006, 117) definition is also useful here:

“The ability to construct new connections between thoughts and objects that

bring about innovation and change, taking known elements and creating

new examples”

From the world of education then, there appears to be agreement that creativity involves shifts in thinking which, in some way, is novel, new, and original. Craft (2001; 2002) provides a useful distinction between what she has called ‘Big C’ and ‘Little C Creativity’: whilst Big C creativity comprises wholesale societal theoretical shifts in understanding (for example the theories of Einstein), whilst with Little C creativity the emphasis is upon the individual’s ability to think and represent in a way that is personally original for them. Little C creativity is positioned as a way of *thinking* in which there is a foregrounding of critical reflection (Craft, 2001; Craft *et al.,* 2013) within an ongoing dialogic process involving the “serious play of ideas and possibilities” (Grainger and Barnes, 2006, 2).  Subsequently, it can be argued that creativity is a “quality of thought,” closely associated with divergent thinking, which young children possess as they theorise about their worlds (Malaguzzi, 2011). Malaguzzi (ibid.) has proposed that there is a strong connection between creativity and intellectual capacities and that creativity is not viewed as a separate mental faculty but a *feature* of thinking (2011, 75). This holds congruence with the theorising of Prentice (2000, 150) who suggests that creativity is “a capacity of human intelligence, rather than a subject or event.”

**Creative behaviours versus creativity, art and reproduction?**

In more recent years there has been an emphasis upon creative behaviours which are associated with the generation of new and novel ways of thinking (Compton, 2007). These include divergent thinking, embracing ambiguity, possessing resilience when making mistakes, flexibility in approach, appreciating complexity and searching for innovative ways of problem solving (Stenberg, 2003; Meadows, 2006). Compton (2007) has added that desirable behaviours associated with creativity will also include the use of evaluation, ideation and imagination through an enquiry based approach. These creative behaviours are deemed to be desirable as the skills needed for the rapidly changing world of work become less predictable, leading creativity to be called a “twenty first century competency” (Davies *et al.,* 2017. 879).

At the same time, it has been proposed that within English and Welsh classrooms that creativity has traditionally been associated with arts-based activities such as art, music and drama rather than creative behaviours (Robson and Rowe, 2012). Prentice (2000) has reasoned that this narrow traditional view should be broadened since it limits the possibilities for children to demonstrate creative behaviours and is therefore detrimental to their learning. Duffy (2006) has furthered this argument by proposing that understandings of creativity are often also conflated with ‘reproduction’ within artistic activities, rather than on the generation of new and novel representations. In these cases, it is further reasoned that children are judged to be successful if they can *re-produce* realistic representations. Such an emphasis upon duplication and consequential conformity is problematic as it is likely to hinder the behaviours associated with creativity since it does not lead to innovation.

**Creativity in classrooms as a risky business**

A central theme within the primary and early years’literature (Craft *et al.,* 2012, 2014) is that creativity is more likely to flourish in contexts where there is limited emphasis upon “prescriptive teaching methods,” and associated heavily pre-planned blocks of learning. This will often involve educators and children working in collaborative reflection with each other and children:

“outside the boundaries of predictability[...] (in) a climate of enquiry, of

ideas and of sensible risk-taking,”

(Grainger and Barnes, 2006, 2).

This point is highly significant: the process of creativity is viewed as uncertain, unpredictable and therefore potentially risky in nature (NACCCE, 1999; Cremin, *et al.,* 2006) since it is believed that it is this type of educational climate which will support the nurturing of creative behaviours (Chicken, 2015).

Risk taking therefore becomes an integral element of the creative process with a necessity for educators to possess a capacity to endure uncertainty and the unknown (Claxton, 1998). This position holds congruence with a long-standing consensus from the early years’community in relation to the pedagogical practices which are believed to foster creativity, or what Craft (2001; 2010) has termed as ‘possibility thinking.’ Child agency is foregrounded and there are high levels of child autonomy in relation to navigating the direction of learning rather than upon pre-specified and measurable destinations (Cremin, Burnard and Craft, 2006; Craft *et al.,* 2012, Malaguzzi, 2011). This means that learning cannot be heavily pre-planned by educators in advance (Chicken, 2015). I would propose that it is these type of environments which are likely to promote the desirable behaviours associated with creative thinking and which will enable children to be prepared for the technological world of work.

Whilst it has been suggested that the early years practitioner should provide opportunities for creative behaviours to be encouraged and nurtured, activities offered to children under the ‘creativity’ umbrella are often unstimulating with limited room for child agency (Duffy, 2006). Research has long argued that a dominance upon performativity and prioritising an external accountability agenda at the macro level leads to depletion of creativity and innovation within education practices (Sternberg and Lubart, 1996; Schoen and Fusarelli, 2008; Burnard and White, 2008Significantly this has been found to be the case even in settings where teachers say that they value creativity (Davies *et al.,* 2017). In these educational environments creativity is less likely to flourish since first, there is an associated heavy emphasis upon targets and outcomes with a subsequent ‘teaching to the test’ mentality (The Education Committee, 2017) and second, conformity takes precedence over creativity and innovation since this is more straightforward to manage ( Davies *et al.,* 2017). Such a desire to tightly manage the creative process may lead to the eradication of desirable creative behaviours with a potential for both teachers and children to become intellectually risk adverse (Azzam, 2009).

**The Policy Context to the study The Welsh Foundation Phase for children aged 3-7**

Since Welsh devolution in 1999, ties between the English and Welsh educational policy context in relation to young children have been disentangled. Teachers working with children between the ages of three and seven do so within the Welsh Foundation Phase curriculum, which beacem legal in 2008 and was updated in 2015 (Welsh Government, 2015). The driver for the Foundation Phase curriculum wasconcerns in relation to the over- formalisation of pedagogy for young children set out in scoping documents including *The Learning Country: The Foundation Phase -3 to 7 years*’ (NAfW, 2003), which argued that opportunities offered to young children were often sedentary, with little emphasis upon developing creative expression or child agency in relation to steering the directionof their own learning. A necessity for opportunities for creative thinking in which problem solving, collaboration and enquiry was highlighted (DCELLS, 2008). Again, it was reasoned that this was essential in an ever-increasing technological world so that children would be able to contribute to the future Welsh economy (WAG, 2010a, p.2). Later documents (WAG, 2010a; 2010b; ESTYN, 2011) proposed that children should be given opportunities for ‘ownership‘ in relation to their learning, that learning contexts should involve a level of enquiry and collaborative group work centred around group co-construction (ESTYN, 2011).

Simultaneously, the ensuing Framework (WAG, 2008a) also highlighted the expected standards of children’s performance in terms of outcomes for each Area of Learning. These unified the Baseline Assessment Scales previously in use and English National Curriculum level descriptors (WAG, 2008, 43) divided into six levels (Table 1). When children finish the Foundation Phase, there is a statutory requirement that they will be assessed against the outcomes for each of the seven areas of learning (Table 1).

**Table 1: Correspondence of FP outcomes with NC levels**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **National Curriculum (NC) Level** | **Foundation Phase** |
| FP Outcome 4 | NC Level 1 |
| FP Outcome 5 | NC Level 2 |
| FP Outcome 6 | NC Level 3 |

This was unexpected since the justification for the new curriculum was a shift from an outcomes orientated agenda but the criteria for success was measured (at least in part) by the levels that children (and teachers) achieved, still connected to the National Curriculum it claimed to withdraw from.

At the same time, Smith’s later review of Arts in Education in Wales (2013) reaffirmed a necessity to promote creativity through twelve recommendations, later validated by the Welsh government, arguing that:

“In this twenty-first century, schooling will increasingly become the basis of a creative society, of a creative economy and a creative culture. Creativity, or being

open to the acquisition of new knowledge and innovative skills, will shape our world like no other force imaginable”. (Smith, 2013,6)

The subsequent Donaldson Report (2015) recommended a move away from a traditional way of structuring teaching and learning for all children through the age range of 3-19, towards a holistic skills based curriculum approach, whilst significantly also endorsing four ‘wider skills’ including ‘creativity and innovation – generating ideas, openness and courage to explore ideas and express opinions ‘(2015, 42).

Perhaps surprisingly then, the Welsh government also re-introduced compulsory annual testing for all children from 7-14 in Numeracy, Reasoning and Literacy, including children in the last year of their Foundation Phase education. This could be viewed as problematic and running as a counter narrative to a creativity policy discourse, as the Donaldson Report maintained:

“For many teachers and schools, the key task has become to implement the prescribed external expectations for the curriculum and accountability faithfully, with a consequent diminution of both local creativity and responsiveness to the individual needs of children and young people.” (Donaldson, 2015, 15)

It is within these debates that this research is contextualised.

**Methods**

The study aimed to explore how creativity was understood and to considerwhat factors may have shaped particular understandings and associated pedagogical practices**.** Drawing on a socio-constructionist theoretical position, the study loosely adopted a narrative case study approach which viewed the construction of meaning as:

“co-constructed and negotiated between the people involved as a means of capturing complex, multi -layered and nuanced understandings” (Etherington, no page)

This paper draws on the data from two studies with a focus on two participant primary headteachers with responsibility for the Foundation Phase curriculum, chosen purposively for this paper in order to illuminate and explore two very different constructions of creativity within primary settings.

The story of the first head teacher, Malcolm, was part of a doctoral study with ten practitioners which examined constructions of enquiry based project approaches and associated pedagogical practices (Chicken, 2015). Analysis indicated that Malcolm’s interpretation of projects was heavily influenced by a creativity discourse. This finding led to a subsequent study which explored constructions of creativity and associated pedagogical practices with four head teachers in more detail. The story of Laura, from the second study, is recounted within this paper in order to make visible and consequently explore some of the contrasting views noted.

Both studies used similar methodology and methods of data collection and were bounded within the same geographical location (South Wales) and within the same curriculum, the Foundation Phase. Settings included private nurseries (age range 0-5), primary schools (3-11) and Foundation Phase settings (3-7).

Over the course of six months a series of semi structured interviews were carried out and initially analysed with codes used to identify themes drawn from the creativity literature (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). After each interview, data was further interrogated with Lozinski and Collinson’s ‘epistemological shudder’:

“when a person‘s preferred representations of their known world prove incapable of

immediately making sense of the marvellous*.”*

(Lozinski and Collinson, 1999, 3-4)

This leads to an *‘aporia’* in understanding, akin to Piagetian disequilibrium and the consequential generation of new questions/lines of enquiry which were subsequently explored in more depth in follow up conversations. In this way there was a to-ing and fro-ing between the process of data collection and that of data analysis which enabled meaning to be constructed and further offered a level of ethical internal integrity (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007).

Between interviews, transcripts and initial analysis were sent to participants for member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and it was hoped that this way of working may alleviate some of the issues of power often associated with the research process. At the same time I acknowledge a tension here since the final decisions in relation to content were, for the most part, my own.

In line with other socio-constructionist research, self-reflexivity was a fundamental tenant of the design (Gergen and Gergen, 1991) and acknowledgement of the positionality of the research essential. As a consequence, it is important to note here that my experiences of working as a teacher in a Reggio inspired setting, accompanied by subsequent research around project approaches which centralise child agency (Maynard and Chicken, 2010; Chicken, 2015) have shaped how I have made meaning from the data.

At the same time the purpose of this is paper is not to be overly judgemental but rather to use these examples to examine different interpretations of creativity in circulation, to explore how these compare with key tenants of the creativity literature ( for example, risk-taking, child agency) and to consider what this might mean in terms of the learning opportunities offered to children.

**Findings - The story of Malcolm**

From our initial meetings, Malcolm, the long standing head teacher of Mill Street Primary School maintained that encouraging creativity was central to the practices he promoted throughout his setting. He explained how creative opportunities were planned termly by teachers through the use of *‘*projects’ which were rotated over a four year period. Malcolm explained that he had used projects such as ‘Treasure Island’ and ‘Alice in Wonderland’ to plan ‘creative learning’ for many years and had developed a bank of planned activities linked to appropriate targets and outcomes in art, drama and music.

Malcolm described an exemplary creativity activity in which children made robots with a range of junk modelling materials. He explained how children, working with some teachers, were left to complete this activity without support and this had led to representations which were not very successful since they did not look at all like robots. In contrast to this, Malcolm worked closely with his group, encouraging children to research robot characteristics before attempting to create a model; Malcolm claimed that this had led his group to produce products which were superior to those of other children because:

“they were far more realistic, they looked like the real deal, I was really happy ...and this was obviously down to careful planning beforehand”.

This description led to an epistemological shudder as it appeared incongruent with the creativity literature. In order to explore this further, I shared a personal memory from my own days as a teacher:

**“Researcher:** I was thinking of a project from my time teaching in a Reggio inspired setting. Children had become interested in engines and were representing these in different ways and media and one child drew what looked like a rotational scribble. When I later asked him about the drawing he said that it was the engine and moved his arm in a fast and furious circular motion - I realised that he was probably representing the concept power behind the engine….

**Malcolm:** Ah yes, so you would then show him pictures of real engines?

**Researcher:** Well, probably not – on reflection his fascination seemed likely to be in the concept of power and movement.”

During interviews I noted an emphasis upon a necessity for thorough planning of creative activities:

“A good project lasts the whole term and needs careful thought so that they are planned properly…..teachers have to ensure that children all meet the targets and this can only be done when activities are planned carefully ….. You know what the outcome is and you put the children on a journey don‘t you?”

Terms such as ‘planning’, ‘outcomes’ and ‘targets’ were used throughout all interviews. Malcolm reasoned that without creative learning opportunities being linked closely to pre-specified targets, ‘haphazard learning’ would take place.*’*  This extended both to the class teachers and to the artist and musician employed by the school:

“So, our artist is fantastic, brilliant but she cannot plan and she is untidy but as an artist she is brilliant so I do the planning and think of outcomes and she does the creative bit (and) the same with the musician she wanted to plan for the reception class but it was at the wrong level and the children were bored so I plan this now”.

This emphasis upon precise planning led to an aporia in my understanding and was highlighted as a potential line of enquiry which was followed up in a later conversation:

**“Researcher:** I am interested in terminology which runs throughout our first conversations in relation to projects- these include standards, outcomes, targets and then creativity ….. How do these issues sit together? I mean when I first saw them together I found this quite puzzling and wondered if they might be contradictory………..

**Malcolm:** No, not at all, they are not contradictory but complementary… I plan the targets for the artist and musician and they do the creative bit. When I left them to plan it wasn‘t successful.”

Malcolm added that ensuring that children met specified outcomes through thorough planning was the hallmark of a good teacher:

“You can judge them (the teachers) by the outcomes, the outcomes

of children, there has to be careful planning and preparation, it‘s

black and white and our test results speak for themselves”.

Malcolm reasoned that creativity and creative activities were important for young children since they provided opportunities for self-expression. When asked to give an example of this in practice, he explained that:

“It‘s about the children, from their project work, how can children express themselves. So, we have this little spider and we have read factual books about spiders and Charlotte‘s web and some direct teaching … now we are going to make webs and spiders, I want a detailed drawing, I want to see what you have learnt, the different parts of the spiders, the different shapes of the spider, the shapes of the spider’s legs, the little spinneret, the spider’s eyes, so quality learning. But if I asked them to write this down they will do it but they haven‘t got the motivation or the interest or perhaps the skills, they haven‘t got that access in, so what we have to do as a school is to give them that access in as well.”

He added that children with undeveloped literacy skills would find it challenging to write about what they had learnt but representations produced during art made this learning visible.

In our last conversation I asked Malcolm about potential connections between creativity and child agency since this had not appeared in the data but was a key theme of the literature. Malcolm explained: “I believe in children coming up with their own ideas but we have to play it safe, (voice softens) it would be too risky just to let them…” When asked to clarify what the risk was, Malcolm added:

“We are creative here but there are certain rules, timetables, things that children and teachers have to conform to. In any organisation there is management, and line management and people to manage, so yes in some ways teachers can be flexible but they have to also give in planning and I also have to conform. I like the creativity of projects but I also have to think about accountability…..covering curriculum, targets, national tests and school inspections… this is the law.”

**The story of Laura**

Laura had become the Head Teacher of Cross Street Primary eight years earlier and described creativity as ‘central to our school ethos.’ From the outset she proclaimed that:

“let’s be really clear; we are moving away from traditional views that creativity is about art and the like, no, within this setting creativity is about all areas of the curriculum and actually more broadly across the life of the school.”

When asked if she could outline the changes that had been made she explained:

“Back in the day we might have linked it (creativity) more closely to certain curriculum areas but creativity is more than that here…..it is about thinking outside of the box, flexible thinking, making mistakes, so we have got rid of heavily over planned projects based on content, they went in the skip when I started, although some teachers were upset by this.”

Laura suggested that planning for creativity was flexible both within and outside of the curriculum. For example a project area might be decided upon from the noted interests of children and then children would be asked what they would like to learn and how they would like to learn this. Teaching staff would also add to the plan and this was described as a ‘collaborative ongoing endeavour’. For instance some children were interested in the television programme ‘Dragon’s Den’ and this had led to a draft plan of potential activities which had been added to by both the teacher and children. Subsequent activities included groups of children working together to come up with ideas which they chose to represent in different ways for example, through drawings, three dimensional modelling, writing, blogs and vlogs. On the suggestion of a parent, these ideas were later pitched to a local bank in the area. In another class children were interested in weddings when a parent had married and this had led to a subsequent fascination with tea parties. The class had later decided to plan an afternoon tea for local senior citizens at the school and over the course of four weeks they were in charge of managing a budget, choosing and then making cakes and sandwiches, creating electronic and written invitations, booking transport for their visitors and ensuring that the spaces were appropriate for visitors with mobility issues. Laura explained that:

“We are trying to be creative with our pedagogy and this is underpinned by the skills our children need, we do not rigidly stick to national requirements. Just like the children, we need to be flexible and adaptable in our approach.”

When further explaining what creativity looked like within the setting, Laura described an instance of what she termed as fundamental to the development of creativity, ‘modelling risk taking.’ Laura explained how a child who was learning to play the guitar was uncomfortable with making mistakes and asked her teacher if she felt the same way when making mistakes too.

“and we got the idea from there and now all teachers are learning to play the guitar and the children decide on a song or tune and they ( the staff) have to play this in assembly once a week. Some of the teachers hate it…but the children are getting the idea that we take risks too and that this is not always a comfortable place to be”.

During the process of meaning making it was noted that terms such as ‘risk taking,’ ‘thinking outside of the box’ and ‘mistake making’ were often used and I explored what these might look like at a practical level in subsequent interviews. Laura gave a number of examples:

“Mistake making is really important, we have banned erasers, they have no place here! We also have ‘class mistake of the week’ and we talk with children about what they have learnt from this particular mistake, this has been so positive for them and for staff too.”

She argued that creativity and risk taking were interlinked and that associated behaviours were important for all members of the school community to display:

“The staff can see that the management are risk takers too, it has to go throughout the school. So for example, we were always tearing our hair out trying to get children to line up and walk in to school in silence, then someone suggested that they just walk in with friends, twos and threes, whatever, some staff had reservations. So this was a risk and, yes, it has worked and now in assembly they sit where they want, so being creative, questioning previous ways of working, trying new things and we all need to be involved and also be okay with the fact that sometimes things might go wrong.”

In our last session we explored the theme of creativity and accountability noted in the data of Malcolm. Laura explained that some staff found it ‘traumatic’ when they had been asked to throw away long term planning because they were worried that they would be unable to ensure that children would meet government targets and felt that they would be deemed accountable for any perceived failure. She added that:

“at the end of the day we are accountable to these children first and foremost, you know, we have to ensure that they have opportunities to support creative behaviours, they are so important for their future lives, you can’t do that if you don’t leave room for a creative mind-set to develop and that is for staff and children to become comfortable with risk, a climate of risk is important.”

When asked how she positioned accountability to external agencies such as the Welsh Inspectorate (Estyn) and the Welsh government she answered:

“If you get it right for the children then the rest will follow, we are putting our children at the centre of what we do here. We are pushing creativity not just in arts but in pedagogy, we are embracing risk here, we are encouraging staff to be risk takers and Donaldson is giving us the freedom to take risks you know entrepreneurial skills, creative environments, discovery, yes some staff have not been comfortable with this but we are privileged to be working in such exciting times.”

**Discussion**

This section now moves on to make meaning from the stories presented above in an attempt to understand how creativity was constructed and to consider what may have shaped different constructions. In doing so I aim to search for what Pring (2004, 11) has called“the logic of the discourse […] the rules implicit in the use of particular words and those to which they are logically related. “ This is deemed as important since interpretations of terminology (in this case ‘creativity’) will impact on the learning opportunities offered to children. This section is presented through three themes:

Constructions of creativity

Creativity and Risk

Creativity, risk an accountability

**Constructions of creativity**Within Malcolm’s interview data, it was noted that there was emphasis upon arts-based media such as art, music and drama associated with more traditional views of creativity and limited reference to creative behaviours. This may have, at times, also been connected to an ability to ‘reproduce’ a product which closely reflected reality, demonstrated by his belief in relation to the superiority of the robots produced by his group, coupled with the comments made regarding the engine project. This finding may be unsurprising as it corresponds with recent research within the English context which also found that teachers often associate creativity with arts, music and drama (Davies *et al,* 2017).

The data also surfaced a tension when compared with the creativity literature which has argued that educators should avoid conflating creativity with the ability to replicate an accurate or realistic representation since this closes down the creative process ( Duffy, 2006). Whilst the literature maintained that creativity is connected to divergent thinking in which innovation and originality are centralised (NACCE, 1999, 29), this finding suggested that within this context, convergent thinking may have been viewed as more significant. A second connected point noted within the data was an emphasis upon producing a finished *product and* a consequential limited reference to creativity as a *process* associated with creative behaviours.

Whilst Malcolm emphasised creativity as a means of expression, his descriptions suggested that ‘creativity’ may have been viewed as a useful tool for *accessing*and subsequently *assessing* the factual content learnt by childrenwhich may have been more difficult to ascertain with younger children who might not have developed writing skills. Comments in relation to the Charlotte’s web project are particularly notable here, ‘I want to see what you have learnt, the different parts of the spiders.*’* In this example the emphasis appears to be upon making visible the content knowledge that children had retained during the teaching and learning process, rather than on utilising art as a means for expressing thoughts, feelings and developing thinking (Malaguzzi, 2011).

Within Laura’s data there appeared to be a cognisant attempt to disassociate creativity with arts based media and a conscious endeavour to embrace a broader view with prominence placed upon creative behaviours. Creativity was discussed both within the school curriculum and within the ethos of the school more broadly, for example children walking into the school with friends instead of lining up. In line with the creativity literature, there was also data to suggest that there was a level of child (and teacher) agency to navigate the direction of learning both within and outside of the formal curriculum. Laura believed that this was possible because managers were questioning previous practice and thinking creatively to develop new and innovative ways of working for their school and within their practice. Particular behaviours were delineated, such as mistake making, thinking outside of the box, and risk taking and practical ways of developing these were outlined and levelled at both managers, staff and children.

***Creativity and Risk***

Malcolm’s emphasis upon planning and control may have been symbolic of an attempt to tidy up and organise creativity within the curriculum both practically and metaphorically and in so doing to manage the perceived chaos of the creative process, within a tight framework. In this way a central role of the teacher seems to have been to alleviate the risk of children from deviating away from predefined targets and outcomes linked to curriculum planning. The potential for creative behaviours to develop may have subsequently been reduced as there were limited possibilities for child autonomy within a risky classroom environment.

Within Cross Street Primary, Laura’s data suggested that risk taking was a behaviour that was actively encouraged for both children *and* staff throughout school life: a central role of the teacher was to model this behavior to children explicitly, as indicated by the example of teachers learning to play the guitar. Further, part of the management’s role was to model risk taking to the staff and school community. In line with the research of Grainger and Baines (2006), risk taking opportunities appear to have been embraced (rather than avoided) both within and outside of the taught curriculum becoming part of the school ethos. At the same time a reoccurring theme was that some staff members were often uncomfortable with the behaviours Laura associated with a ‘creative mindset.’

***Creativity, risk and accountability***

Malcolm’s emphasis upon creativity and accountability were redolent of an underlying tension in thinking. Whilst he acknowledged a need to be flexible within creative based activities, this was interjected with a perceived necessity to ‘conform’ explicitly linked to both the internal structures of the school (rules, timetables, management) and the external policy landscape (Estyn, Inspections and the Welsh Government). A desire to achieve external accountability at the macro level then seems to have been a dominant discourse shaping Malcolm’s interpretation of creativity. This may have led to an aporia between theory and practical application with limited (conceptual) space to ‘take risks’ by deviating from a pre-specified path, idea or target. This was further indicative of a tension with the literature associated with both educational environments where creativity and critical thinking were likely to flourish (for examples, flexibility, limited prescription and high levels of child agency to steer the direction or learning) and further to the desirable behaviours associated with critical thinking such as sensible risk taking, being comfortable with ambiguity, resilience when making mistakes and valuing complexity. Whilst Malcolm might have maintained that creativity was a dominant discourse, meaning making of the data indicates that this was interjected with a discourse of regulatory modernity (Moss, 2007) in which outcomes, targets and accountability were foregrounded. In this way it is likely that Malcolm may have succumbed to the ‘regulatory gaze,’ (Osgood, 2006) shaping understandings of creativity within a ‘policy panopticon’ (Ball, 1990). The dominance of this discourse appears to lead to a necessity to limit uncertainty and risk, through tightly planned activities and subsequently the strength of this discourse may subvert the creative process. As was the case with the practitioners of Kettler *et al.* (2018) who claimed that they valued creativity, evidence suggests that creative characteristics might be less desirable in practice since they are more challenging to control.

Laura’s data also indicated acknowledgement of an accountability discourse butin this case it was claimed that this began at the micro level of the child within the setting rather that with external bodies such as the Welsh inspectorate, ESTYN. This different construction of accountability may have led to freedom from the shackles of a regulatory modernity discourse in which external pre-determined targets were foregrounded. Corresponding with the teachers in the research of Maynard and Chicken (2010) this led to teachers being less constrained and ‘letting go’. As a consequence, there may have been more autonomy to embrace an ethos of risk taking both within and externally to the taught curriculum. Significantly, Laura offered the policy context of the Donaldson Report as validation for this freedom and the associated pedagogical practices underpinned by risk taking encouraged within her setting. However, it was also noted that some members of her team were uncomfortable with this position since they remained concerned about external facing accountability and associated markers.

**Conclusions**

Almost two decades ago Prentice (2000) argued that early childhood practitioners were caught between the increasing governmental pressures at the time to adopt more formal approaches, whilst also recognising the significance of encouraging creativity within early years settings. Whilst the current Welsh policy context appears to be moving away from prescriptive pedagogical processes, the power of the accountability agenda with associated emphasis on performativity may remain as a pervasive and powerful instrument in shaping constructions of creativity and associated pedagogical practices. This is problematic since economic drivers indicate that creative behaviours should be nurtured but a desire for control and conformity is likely to lead to the limitation of the risky educational environments deemed necessary for creative behaviours to flourish. As the Welsh education system retains annual testing for all children from the age of seven and high stakes school inspections, some teachers might find this dilemma difficult to reconcile. As Kettler and colleagues (2018) have recently argued, where assessments are perceived as high stakes and there is strong emphasis upon external accountability, the focus moves from:

“higher-level thinking … toward fundamental knowledge, rote memorization of

facts, and results-based learning.” (Kettler *et al.,* 2018,164)

At the same time there may be the potential for creative behaviours to be nurtured when risk taking is embraced through whole school collaborative approaches involving management, all staff and children. This may be possible when broad views of creativity are considered and where accountability is reconstructed as starting at the micro level of the *child*. This may necessitate a shift from privileging accountability to external facing bodies first and foremost at the macro level. Nevertheless, this may require a leap of faith from school leaders who have been institutionalised by professional engagement with longstanding foci upon performativity.

As the rapid technological age advances creative behaviours are likely to become more significant and as a consequence the tensions surfaced within this paper are viewed as noteworthy to all those involved with the provision of pedagogical practices for young children. This is because different constructions and understandings of ‘creativity’ will influence the experiences presented to children (and their teachers) in the name of learning (Beghetto, 2013).

Given this significance, more research is needed to:

* Support shifts from traditional views of creativity as only being a feature of arts-based subjects
* Explicate links between creative behaviours and creative pedagogical practice
* Explore the conditions ( including policies and associated training) necessary to support settings to become more comfortable with risk-taking

The current educational zeitgeist within the post-Donaldson Welsh policy context might offer some form of validation for head teachers who are willing to be risk takers, as Laura maintained ‘we are privileged to be working in such exciting times.’

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In accordance with Taylor & Francis policy and my ethical obligation as a researcher, I am reporting that I do not have any financial and/or business interests in any company/organisation that may be affected by the research reported in the enclosed paper.

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