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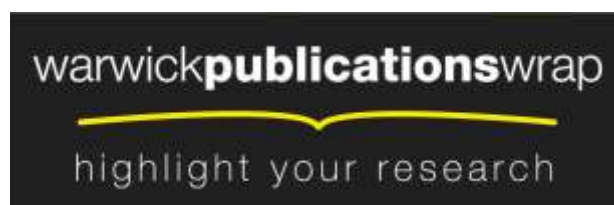
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SCHOOLS AS CREATIVE BEACONS
Creative Partnerships (CP), Coventry.

Dr Stephen Cullen
Dr Dimitra Hartas
Dr Jane Medwell
Professor Geoff Lindsay

Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research,
University of Warwick.

Warwick Institute of Education, University of Warwick.

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The University of
Warwick

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Creative Partnerships, Coventry

Creative Partnerships (CP) is based at Arts Council England, and aims to 'provide school children across England with the opportunity to develop creativity in learning and to take part in cultural activities of the highest quality'. Creative Partnerships, Coventry, involved 19 participating schools, organised in three home groups, each group sharing a common CP theme. Each home group was assigned a research mentor from the Warwick Institute of Education (WIE), or the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR), University of Warwick. The research mentors' role was to assist the CP schools in the research evaluation process, and to report on the schools' CP action research.

2. Headline Conclusions

- Overall, the CP projects have been successful, both in terms of the implementation of creative projects, and in the action research evaluations undertaken by school CP co-ordinators and staff.
- School staff underwent a learning experience, in which they developed action research skills. In addition, in some CP schools, structures are being developed which will sustain future action research.
- Successful CP activity depends on school CP staff receiving the full support of senior management in schools.
- The home group structure is a key element in the successful sharing of knowledge, and the future extension of creative teaching and learning in schools will depend on the development of the home groups structure.

3. Main Findings

- School CP staff have developed new evaluation techniques and knowledge.
- Existing evaluation and dissemination structures have been formalised.

- Schools and staff are at different trajectories with regard to research development and practice.
- There was a variety of initial responses among school staff to the terminology used, for example, some staff were nervous of the idea of being involved in 'research'.
- A wide range of school staff, both teaching and non-teaching, were often involved in the delivery of the CP projects.
- CP co-ordinators are key figures in the implementation of CP projects.
- Full SMT support is important for the success of CP projects.
- The CP home groups are central to the sharing and dissemination of knowledge between and beyond participating schools.

4. Recommendations

- Research mentors should be introduced to the CP action research process at the outset.
- Initial evaluation research/action research briefings should be given to participating teachers before the start of CP projects.
- The home group system should be strengthened, and participating school staff should be encouraged to take ownerships of their home group.
- SMT staff should be encouraged to take a full supporting role in CP projects.
- The role of research mentors should be clarified.
- A small team of school staff with CP experience could be formed to provide support for the extension of CP in the Coventry area.

1. The national concept

Creative Partnerships (CP) is based at Arts Council England, and aims to ‘provide school children across England with the opportunity to develop creativity in learning and to take part in cultural activities of the highest quality’ (www.creative-partnerships.com/aboutcp/) There are 36 areas around England that are designated CP areas, including Creative Partnerships, Coventry. CP work with schools to identify their individual needs, and facilitate the establishment of creative ways of teaching and learning. Schools can draw upon outside ‘Creative Advisers’, who provide them with expert knowledge of creative resources that are available. Examples of these ‘creatives’ include theatre companies, museums, dance studios, recording studios, film-makers, website designers, and the BBC. As part of the CP scheme, participating schools are expected to evaluate their CP projects, and to ensure the dissemination of creative learning and teaching practice, both within and without their school environment. To assist schools in the evaluation task, research mentors are assigned to groups of schools, known as ‘home groups’, involved in similar CP projects. The research mentors’ role is to support the action research work of teachers, particularly CP coordinators, in schools.

1.1 CP Coventry

CP Coventry encompassed 19 primary and secondary schools, organised in three home groups, each group sharing a broad, but common, CP theme. The schools and CP themes are identified in figure 1.

Figure 1: CP Coventry home groups and schools

Home Group and CP Theme	Schools in Home Group
Home Group 1: Transition	Courthouse Green Primary
	Finham Primary
	Finham Park Secondary
	Stivichall Primary
	Earlsdon Primary
	Southfields Primary
Home Group 2: Creative Curriculum	Blue Coat Secondary
	Ernesford Grange Secondary
	St Barts Primary
	Pearl Hyde Primary
	Tile Hill Wood Secondary
	Mount Nod Primary

Home Group 3: Inclusion	Dartmouth Secondary School/PRU Deedmore Primary Special School Edgewick Primary Foxford Secondary Hillfields EY Ex ctr Lyng Hall Secondary St Mary's & St Ben's Primary	Special
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Each home group was assigned a research mentor drawn from the Warwick Institute of Education (WIE), or the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR), University of Warwick. Each research mentor was to act as an outside expert to develop, mentor and evaluate the schools' action research programme. Schools were expected to undertake a number of tasks in relation to their action research programme:

- Document their CP projects
- Collect evidence
- Evaluate their projects
- Share their learning with each other

1.2 Schools and home groups

School CP co-ordinators were expected to meet together as a home group twice a term. CP Coventry did not envisage home groups as 'straightjackets', but, nonetheless, it did outline their intended purpose and function:

'The function of the *home group* is to enable partners to collaborate on research, to challenge and support each other, work together on projects where appropriate and to share and disseminate good practice [...] All schools will be addressing individual needs. However, programmes, projects and research will also be informed by and contribute to their home group theme and collaborative research projects are encouraged. [...] Partnerships and sharing of learning with other schools both in and out of the Creative Partnerships programme are both facilitated and encouraged. Partners are encouraged to use home group colleagues as critical friends and research

buddies. External researchers and evaluators will work with teams of research buddies’.

(Creative Partnerships Coventry, *Partners’ Pack*)

The initial conception of CP schools in home groups therefore envisaged a reasonably high level of co-operation and collaboration between CP co-ordinators and schools.

1.3 Research mentors

Creative Partnerships was envisaged as an action research programme in which participating schools were seen to be engaged in continuous evaluation of their CP projects. The purpose of the evaluations was to provide evidence-based reflections designed to support changing practice in education in relation to the impact of creativity on teaching and learning. To support CP co-ordinators and teachers in their action research, mentors were appointed to each school, one per home group. The role of the research mentors was set out by CP Coventry:

‘We will support schools by linking them with outside experts to develop, mentor and evaluate their action research programme. A relevant expert from a higher education institution or equivalent may support several schools researching a similar are. We will also support teachers who want to hone their research skills and gain accreditation for their work’.

(Creative Partnerships Coventry, *Partners’ Pack*, ‘Learning from your adventures’)

This statement provided the sole outline of the role of the research mentors.

1.4. Methodology

The three research mentors from the Warwick Institute of Education, and the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, University of Warwick, were each assigned to one of the three home groups. Each research mentor developed links with the participating CP schools, particularly with the school CP co-ordinators, but also with other participating staff, including action research staff, SMT staff, and creative advisors assigned to each school. In all, 37 meetings were held with participating CP school staff. The research mentors drew up contemporaneous notes after each meeting. These notes were used as the basis for this report, to which each

research mentor had added a summary of the key themes, issues and recommendations from their home group of CP schools.

2. Positive outcomes

On the whole, the CP projects have been successful, and in terms of the evaluations, some very good work has been done by CP co-ordinators and teachers. Although schools are at different stages in the implementation, and evaluation, of CP projects, a good deal of effective work, and informed, reflective evaluation has taken place. Positive outcomes include:

- *The collation of evaluation data from a wide range of sources:* written, audio and visual recordings, feedback from parents, pupils, teachers, teaching assistants, 'creatives'. There was a widespread drive to obtain practitioner, parent, and pupil voices, and to fully integrate those voices into the evaluation processes.
- *The development of evaluation techniques:* including the appreciation that the acknowledgement of 'negative' outcomes is as important as the recognition of positive outcomes.
- *The formalisation of existing evaluation methods and practices:* for example, the dissemination of findings at full staff meetings. Typically, teachers already exhibited good, though often unconscious and unsystematised, reflective practice. The CP evaluation requirements led to CP co-ordinators and teachers structuring and formalising their existing reflective practice, as well as building new methods into that practice.
- *The development of processes and structures:* to ensure that future projects are subject to evaluation planning from the outset. In some cases, schools established new creativity committees, composed of CP project staff and other staff, working on the extension of creativity in teaching and learning, as well as embedding the knowledge gained in CP practice and evaluation.
- *Important CPD experiences for CP teachers,* enabling them to take leading roles in future evaluations. CP projects also played a prominent role in the CPD of a number of 'action research' teachers involved in higher level degree work. These teachers were able to provide additional inputs to CP projects in their schools, while using CP work as part of their own personal progression.
- *School staff are at different trajectories:* with regard to research development and practice. Some were more pro-active, confident and enthusiastic than

others. Nevertheless, they all made a good progress with regard to thinking about their evaluation research, becoming aware of the phases of a research project and developing a strategy to complete a pilot project. Many teachers felt that research is not an abstract entity but something they already do in their professional practice. They welcomed guidance on making research manageable in terms of understanding the phases of research and draw links to the work they already do and the data sets they already have.

- *The process of formulating research questions:* this was interesting in itself, and staff developed an understanding of how research questions and hypotheses are formulated. Teaching staff understood that engaging in action research is not just a mechanistic process, but a part, or a by-product, of becoming reflective of one's own practice.
- *The participation of a wide range of school staff* in CP projects, in-service sessions and the dissemination of ideas in school. For example, one secondary school CP project involved school cleaning staff in the pupil-led upgrading of school public spaces.
- *Teachers working with creatives from 'outside'.* This was not an unthreatening experience because the work of the 'creatives' is often outside the experience and control of teachers. Moreover, the idea that individual pupil outcomes were variable was unnerving for some teaching staff. The experience of working with 'creatives' was extremely rewarding for the schools involved. All the schools reported very positive outcomes and experiences for themselves and the children.
- *Schools engaging with the idea of developing children's creativity* (at a level beyond improving art and music provision). This involved schools taking a certain amount of risk, in the sense that individual outcomes for children cannot be fully "planned". However, teachers learned to cope with this and to develop their expectations based on experience and observation.
- *The reconceptualisation of the meaning of creativity and teachers' hopes and expectations for children.* In a number of cases the process of undertaking a CP project led the teachers and the CP co-ordinator involved to reconceptualise the meaning of creativity and their hopes and expectations for children. This was a particularly important outcome of early CP projects as it will feed directly into the design and goals for subsequent projects undertaken by those schools. It has also been disseminated to a wider

audience through CP activity, such as the 'Talking Creative Lessons' day and media reports or appearances.

3. Themes and Issues

There was a remarkable degree of similarity in terms of the themes and issues that emerged from each of the home groups. Problems manifested themselves across schools and seemed, therefore, to suggest that there were issues that needed to be addressed across the programme, rather than at individual school level. These were:

- *Terminology*: some of the terminology employed by CP seemed to be inappropriate, creating uncertainty and confusion in the mind of teachers. For example, the use of the term 'research' implied to most teachers a task that they were ill-equipped to undertake. The issue of the meaning of 'research' has been outlined above, and is a good example of the question.
- *Timing*: given that the strategic plan of CP Coventry involves a roll out of the programme throughout Coventry schools, some attention should be paid to the timing, for example, of the appointment of mentors, and the briefing of teachers on how to conduct action research. Similarly, there appears to have been problems in the full provision of the necessary paperwork in order to allow teachers to complete such paperwork before deadlines. There were also notable funding issues, with some schools having to allocate funds from other, non-CP sources, due to the failure of national CP to deliver funds within financial year deadlines.
- *CP school leadership*: the recruitment of CP co-ordinators seems to be a key issue within schools. The way in which co-ordinators are appointed is of importance, as is the need for them to be seen to be backed by SMTs. Both of these factors have a role in the success of CP projects. Closer working relationships between CP co-ordinators and SMTs in schools are needed. It was felt that, in some schools, there was simply a small number of staff undertaking the research, a dedicated team, lacking whole-school involvement. Sustainability in such cases is open to question.
- *Role of the CP co-ordinator*: the role of the CP co-ordinator is the key criterion by which the project succeeds or fails. The most successful CP coordinators are those that have a strong vision for their projects and are able, as well as enabled, to maintain their commitment to the projects. Successful CP co-ordinators have

involved other staff in their schools and have promoted work that recruited the interest and commitment of staff. Co-ordinators with a peripheral interest, or those who cannot allocate attention to their projects, are less successful and these projects are characterised by slower pace and less staff involvement. It should be recognised that CP coordinators are under a good deal of time pressure, and teacher release planning, for instance, must take place well in advance. In rolling out the CP programme to a wider range of schools it will be important that schools really understand that CP activity demands commitment and time from the coordinator and school beyond the CP financed time allocated for staff release. Given the workload of teachers, this is a key consideration.

- *Spreading the CP message:* this is a main aim of the CP programme, and appears to have met with varied levels of success within schools. Some schools have built upon their CP experience by setting up working groups to examine ways of sharing creative practice, and to design new creative projects, using CP funding and other sources of finance. Other schools have been less successful in this respect. The 'Talking Creative Lessons' day held at the Transport Museum in Coventry on 13th June, 2006, appeared to be a successful example of dissemination, and was welcomed by those who took part. Some schools have also been active in disseminating practice at parents' and teachers' events, through newsletters, and through the local and regional media.
- *Home group effectiveness: the home groups are seen to be an important part of the CP programme,* enabling schools to support one another, and as a method of spreading the CP message. However, it is clear that the home groups were not as effective, in some cases, as they might be. There were issues here of co-ordination, shared goals, sharing of practice and experience, the facilitation and maintenance of contact between schools and CP co-ordinators, and the degree to which home group meetings are fully utilised for these important ends. The purpose of the home groups should also be further clarified, for example, are they a forum for sharing ideas and good practice regarding research projects across schools, or is the focus on disseminating research practice by drawing together the research themes across different schools? Of those home group meetings observed, some of them lacked direction and purpose, especially with regard to research and dissemination of research practice. In all cases home groups have an important structural role in reviewing progress, sharing and revising difficulties, presenting deadlines and monitoring activity. Where home group meetings were managed and chaired by CP co-ordinators, there was a sharper focus on the needs of the CP schools and the home group. Where the

home group was managed and chaired by CP staff there was an emphasis on the home group's monitoring role as the co-ordinators saw it as a forum to consult CP about details such as forms, delivery dates and ongoing negotiations.

- *Uncertain outcomes:* the research outcomes of the CP projects are unclear to participants. Although in process terms, the outcomes were systematic evaluation and sustainability of creative activity in school, co-ordinators were naturally interested in shorter term and more tangible outcomes. It would be a good idea to suggest a range of possible outcomes at the very start of a project and to agree with the co-ordinators, as part of the project agreement, what these should be. This would remove the uncertainty from co-ordinators and, if these outcomes were linked to accountability, emphasise the efficient use of staff time. Outcomes have included presentations to the Talking Creative Lessons day, presentations to staff in school, submission of written or visual materials for accredited action research modules, and evaluations as part of the CP paperwork. All these are important outcomes but the current coordinators do not have a very clear view of their progress towards such outcomes.

4. Research Mentors and the Mentoring Process

A number of issues relating to the role of the research mentors arose in all three home Groups. There was a lack of clarity, in the eyes of school CP co-ordinators and teachers, about the function of research mentors, and their relationship with schools, and the evaluation process. This was a universal experience, which manifested itself in a number of ways. The issues relating to this problem were:

- *Timing:* the research mentors were appointed after schools had begun their CP projects. As a result, CP teams and co-ordinators had begun the evaluation process with little support. This resulted in weaknesses in their action research, for example, in the area of baseline data collection, or in the construction of a clear timeline for the evaluation process.
- *Conceptualisation of research:* the introduction of research mentors during the course of projects proved disturbing for some CP co-ordinators because of their understanding of the nature of research. The role of research mentor proved to be one of supporting structured reflection on practice, with the aim of promoting the sustainability of CP projects and outcomes in schools, rather than a more

traditional role of research training. It would be useful for this expectation to be introduced at the start of a CP project.

- *Nomenclature*: linked with the above point, the use of the term 'research' proved to be problematic for many of the CP co-ordinators. Other, less intimidating terminology might be considered, such as 'practitioner reflection'.
- *Research and CP monitoring*: the school co-ordinators participated in structured monitoring and evaluation of their projects, using a range of resources provide by CP. The research element of the project would be more central if it were overtly integrated into the existing CP monitoring and sharing mechanisms. In this way, ongoing evaluation would draw productively from the research element of the project, using selected data to produce well supported, critical evaluations
- *Research and mentoring*: clarity with regard to research evaluation and mentoring is required. Ethically and practically, it is important for staff to see evaluation and mentoring as two inter-related yet separate activities. The process of rapport building is essential for mentoring and, it can be compromised if staff perceive the role of the mentor as being the evaluator.

5. Recommendations

- *The recruitment of a small group of existing CP co-ordinators as an experienced CP practitioner team*: this would facilitate the extension of CP into other Coventry schools, enabling those schools to benefit from the experiences of existing CP schools and teachers.
- *The strengthening of the home group system*: in particular CP co-ordinators and teachers should be given a leading role in the planning and running of home group meetings.
- *Initial evaluations briefings to be given to new CP co-ordinators **before** they embark on any CP project*: these briefings could be given to home groups of CP co-ordinators at a single meeting, and would address the common misconceptions encountered among CP teachers with regard to the nature and purpose of action research, as well as giving advice and guidance about conducting evaluations.
- *Simplified documentation*: clearer, and more succinct, documentation provided to schools, with all the necessary 'paperwork' (including electronic forms) being listed *prior* to the start of a CP project. For example, co-ordinators frequently

complained about the raising of forms containing very similar information, and felt that a master copy could be completed from which all the necessary information could subsequently be drawn. Teachers' perceptions that CP projects involve an inordinate amount of 'paperwork' is a disincentive to the recruitment of co-ordinators.

- *Encourage SMTs to be part of research teams:* this is especially important in schools where more than one project takes place, in order to ensure coherence and avoid duplication of effort. In some schools more than one research project ran, but with limited cross-referencing and cross-fertilisation taking place.
- *Clarify the role of the mentor:* (i) to provide an input across phases of research, particularly helping delineate and unpack research questions as well as an input into the current research studies in the area; (ii) to raise awareness of the phases of research; (iii) to support the process of data analysis and interpretation of results.
- *To increase the effectiveness of the role of the mentor:* the timeline of mentoring needs to fit the timeline of the school activities and research. Staff working on research projects should be encouraged to circulate their work prior to the meetings with the mentor to maximize input.
- *Create a neutral place for meetings:* schools, being busy environments, are not always the best places to meet with staff working on research.
- *Support teachers and SMTs to develop a sense of ownership with regard to the research process:* rather than seeing it as an externally imposed activity or a writing product that the mentor will deliver for them. The mentor can play a pivotal role in this.

6. Concluding Remarks

The experience of CP work in the 19 participating Coventry schools was, overall, one that was characterised by success. In terms of the evaluation and action research components of the CP programme, some very good work was undertaken by participating teaching staff, and school CP co-ordinators. For most of the staff involved, undertaking action research was a new experience. In consequence, they were involved in a new learning experience, and, overall, notable progress was made. Although not all schools will complete their pilot phase of research by the end of July, staff involved in research feel more confident in developing research cultures and engaging in professional reflection and dialogue with each other. For the

research mentors, a large part of the mentoring process involved understanding the particular school contexts that impacted on research, and the need to nurture staff to place value on their professional practice and, consequently, on their research. Much has been learned from the evaluation processes, and CP co-ordinators, teaching staff, and schools are in a better position now to develop creativity throughout the curriculum than before the CP programme. Some schools have learnt from previous projects about effective time management. They have built in planning and reflection time for staff.

Nonetheless, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed at CP Coventry, home group, and school levels. These have been presented in detail in this report, but, essentially, they are issues involving the need for greater clarity in terms of individual and group functions, and in terms of the research requirements on CP co-ordinators. In addition, communication and contact issues need to be addressed, both within schools, for example between SMTs and CP co-ordinators, and between schools and CP co-ordinators within home groups.

The CP Coventry programme has delivered some effective and interesting projects in the Coventry schools involved. Action research has, on the whole, been conducted in a successful manner by school CP co-ordinators and participating teaching staff, for whom the evaluation process has often represented a steep learning curve.