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Compliance and Creativity? Compliance or Creativity?

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Abstract
Many teachers and pupils today are beginning to question current primary educational practice (Ogunleye, 2003, Wragg, 2003). They find themselves compliant to an overcrowded curriculum model based on content rather than pedagogy. Those who recognise that engagement and enjoyment is key to learning complain of frustration with a lack of opportunity to address teaching and learning more creatively (MacGilchrist, 2003, Hofkins, 2003). For those committed to broadening educational opportunities for all children so they can participate in the twenty-first century, is it not time to reconsider the current curriculum model that appears to be failing so many?

This paper reports on selected results of case study collaborative action research in the primary curriculum. It focuses on the implementation, in a class of Year Six pupils, of a cross-curricula project-based model where design and technology provided the integrative focus. This model sought to overcome a pedagogical dichotomy between compliance and creativity, raised by the Headteacher and recognised in the literature. The research addressed two important questions:

- Was it feasible, in a climate under immense pressure to focus on standards and measurement in the core subjects, to provide a broad and balanced primary curriculum model which embraced rather than marginalised the arts?
- Would such an alternative model allow teachers to explore more creative learning and teaching methods and encourage greater levels of engagement on behalf of the pupils?

The paper highlights the wider context surrounding the current primary curriculum debate and presents selected findings which provided evidence to suggest that through the application of a process-led pedagogy it is possible to address compliance with National Strategies and the National Curriculum whilst at the same time enhance the creative potential of learning and teaching.

Key words: compliance, creativity, design and technology, primary curriculum, project-based model.

Introduction
There is little doubt that it is with a predominant 'performance model' of primary education more reminiscent of the nineteenth century that we entered the twenty-first century (Pollard, 2000:24). This is not to imply that primary education has moved little in the last hundred years. History relates that the role of primary education has shifted from its initial focus on developing practical skills and social abilities for life to one of preparing individuals for Standard Achievement Tests (SATs), that form the basis of a school's standing in primary league tables (Richards, 2000:3). The compliance of primary schools today is perhaps reflective of a generation acceptant of and socialised by media rhetoric, economically driven policy and educational initiatives promoted more for political credence rather than pedagogical merit.

It is interesting to note that the titles of some of the more recent government funded reports: *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (1998); *Maintaining Breadth and Balance at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2* (1998); *The Curriculum in Successful Primary Schools* (2002); *Designing and Timetabling the Primary Curriculum* (2002), *Creativity: Find It, Promote It* (2002) and *The Primary Strategy document: Excellence and Enjoyment* (2003) suggest widespread concern about our current primary curriculum model. The need for balance to be redressed in favour of creativity (in learning and teaching) and recognition of the need to utilise teachers intuitive capabilities (Claxton, 2000) appears to be gaining ground. What is perhaps more important is that some of these reports draw on contemporary thinkers influencing pedagogy today (Gardner 1993, Bruner 1990, Goleman, 1996, Claxton 2000, DeBono, 2000). Whilst criticism that these reports merely pay lip service to the cries of dispirited teachers may have some validity, I would argue that some guidance is better than none and that many of the statements or suggestions for improving the current curriculum model provide credence to more radical approaches.

The case study context
It was within the above context and with similar concern that the current curriculum had already 'strangled the holy curiosity of enquiry' (Einstein, cited in NACCCE 1999) that the Headteacher of a small rural school (130 pupils) sought collaborative support to review their curriculum model. Aware that

her school was no longer the exciting place of learning it once was she was questioning what was going wrong. Despite efforts on her part to retain aspects of creativity within the curriculum with regard to both learning and teaching, she was very concerned that children's work was becoming formulaic and that some of her pupils seemed disaffected. As a result many of her teachers had also become disillusioned.

As the Year 6 teacher identified (see Figure 1) the basis for complaint lie in compliance to demanding government initiatives and political pressure to assure the outside world that schools were raising standards (Wragg, 2003).

Identified Problem/Complaint	Consequences
Too much emphasis and teaching time spent on work related to tests and testing	Didactic teaching approach used and unmotivating work set resulting in disaffected pupils and unenthusiastic teachers
Too much emphasis on teaching of literacy and numeracy to the exclusion of all other subjects particularly art and design/design and technology	A perceived hierarchy of subjects providing a timetable which gives little time or importance to non-core subjects and resulting in poor learning and teaching experiences in these subjects
Squeezed timetable means evidence of work is generally paper based and needs to be produced within a short time scale	Unimaginative work expected from pupils resulting in less enthusiastic approach to completion of work and subsequent underachievement
School policy committed to delivery of QCA schemes of work restricting flexibility of content	Repetitive teaching situation and a lack of opportunity for intuitive practice to lead learning focus into areas relevant to specific interest
Pupils used to a prescriptive subject specific and teacher led curriculum have few skills in time management or independence	Over-reliance on teachers, intensive delivery and pupils ill-prepared to cope with KS3 and therefore worried about transition.

Figure 1

What they considered to be causing the children to feel dispirited about their experiences of learning, was a curriculum dominated by a hierarchy of literacy and numeracy which measured their 'success' by a series of tests (Ogunleye, 2003) - a curriculum which, despite the dedication of a strong Head and committed teachers to provide the contrary, appeared to pupils and teachers as value laden in favour of the core subjects and didactic teaching.

A question of research

Out of this apparent dichotomy between compliance and creativity within the primary sector and raised in the exploratory investigation, two questions emerged that formed the basis of the subsequent study:

- Was it feasible, in a climate under immense pressure to focus on standards and measurement in the core subjects, to provide a broad and balanced primary curriculum model, which embraced rather than marginalised the arts?
- Would such an alternative model allow teachers to explore more creative learning and teaching methods and encourage greater levels of engagement on behalf of the pupils?

Addressing compliance

Is it feasible then, in a climate under immense pressure to focus on standards and measurement in the core subjects, to provide a broad and balanced primary curriculum model which embraces rather than marginalises the arts? To answer this question a project-based curriculum was developed that incorporated many of the National Curriculum subjects and complied, as far as was possible, to the requirements of the NLS and NNS for the half term of the study. However, it was deemed essential that creativity be firmly at the heart of the planned work. It was noted that many of the schools which the OFSTED report *The Curriculum inSuccessful Primary Schools* (2002) highlighted were reported to have "a strong emphasis on arts,

as this motivated pupils and contributed to their enthusiasm for school and education generally'. In an effort to incorporate these findings the design and technology process formed an integrative structure around which the curriculum was designed. A suitable centre of interest was identified in accordance with the Reggio Emilia approach for integrated curriculum work (Katz, 1994:52). To this end the pupils were asked to design and make the packaging and related promotional materials for a new chocolate bar. This allowed meaningful connections to be made between taught material and the children's own experiences - a point supported by many design and technology educators (Benson, 2002, Kimbell, 2000, Howe, Davies & Ritchie, 2001).

The project work aimed to provide an engaging learning and teaching experience where subjects could interconnect but where content was still wide and varied. Having decided on a central focus, the QCA criteria for creative pupils (QCA, 2003) provided a basis upon which to guide the proposed materials and strategies (see Figure 2).

QCA Criteria for creative pupils	Proposed materials / strategies
Questioning and challenging	Debates on trade between developed and undeveloped countries, group activity discussions on consumerism, analysis of advertisements, analysis of existing products, debating product preferences, ethics of advertising, ethics of Fairtrade, self and peer assessment of product
Making connections and seeing relationships	Relating the trading of bananas with trade issues in general, applying knowledge about advertising to persuasive writing, linking knowledge about Fairtrade or life in Ghana with logos and slogans for chocolate products, linking visual images with concepts covered in project work for creating collage work
Envisaging what might be	Designing new products, suggesting alternatives for trade problems, identifying improvements in selling Fairtrade products, prediction of future shopping trends
Playing with ideas, keeping options open	Developing design ideas, developing advertising ideas as PowerPoint, creating collage work
Representing ideas in a variety of ways	Pupils were encouraged to record their work in any way they felt appropriate plus using design sheets, ICT and collage artwork
Evaluating effects of ideas and actions	Many discussion opportunities planned for end of sessions plus opportunities to present work to whole class and group. Encouragement of self, peer and group evaluations

Figure 2

As stated, much of the work that was due to be covered during that half term was incorporated into the materials and strategies. As the school had adopted the QCA Schemes of Work, the requirements for each subject were identified, as were those for literacy and numeracy. The requirements were then adjusted to relate to the focus in as many ways as possible. For example where 'study of a distant place' in geography was the proposed focus, Ghana was chosen for its relationship to cocoa. Where persuasive writing was the emphasis in the planned literacy work, pupils were asked to create advertisements for their chocolate bars, and so on. The aim was to provide a more holistic learning experience by intertwining the project focus and the required learning thus providing elements of compliance and creativity.

Finally, by slightly changing the context of the design work to 'Design and make packaging for a new Fairtrade chocolate bar' it was possible to introduce the less familiar concept of Fairtrade. Invaluable aspects of citizenship could therefore be introduced within a relevant and meaningful context. As a non-statutory subject at primary level citizenship is often a curriculum area many teachers feel ill prepared to teach and which is often perceived as being yet another addition to an already overcrowded curriculum resulting in valuable learning and teaching being left untouched. By identifying Fairtrade as a central aspect of the design work however, and by using some excellent pre-written materials from Comic Relief it was not difficult to incorporate citizenship into the heart of the project. It is also worth noting how readily the learning and teaching of such concepts provided relevant opportunities to address all the QCA creative criteria outlined previously.

The timetable given in Figure 3 worked together with the mode of delivery identified in Figure 2 demonstrates an effective response to the first question posed. It presents a curriculum model, which attempts to reshape the more traditional elements in line with the personal and social requirements of learners in the twenty-first century.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
9.00 - 9.30 Register/dinners Silent reading	9.00- 9.30 Register/dinners Silent reading	9.00 - 9.15 Register/Dinners 9.15 - 9.30 Church	9.00- 9.30 Register/dinners Silent reading	9.00- 9.30 Register/dinners Silent reading
9.30 - 10.30 Numeracy/Literacy/ ICT: CHOCS AWAY 1a	9.30 - 10.30 Lit/Citizenship/ PSHE BANANA TRADE GAME Numeracy/PSHE WHAT IS CHOCOLATE MADE OF? 1c	9.30 - 10.30 Literacy/ Topic Work DMA - DESIGNING PACKAGING	9.30 - 10.30 Literacy/PSHE FAIRTRADE TREATS 3a DOUBLE CLICK DELIGHT 3b	9.30 - 10.30 Topic Work/ Literacy/Numeracy/ ICT CREATING PACKAGING
Playtime	Playtime	Playtime	Playtime	Playtime
10.45 - 11.45 Literacy/Geography THE CHOCOLATE JOURNEY 1b	10.45 - 11.45 Literacy/Geography /Citizenship FAIRTRADE WEB WHIRL 2a	10.45 - 11.45 Topic Work/Literacy DESIGN WORK cont.	10.45 - 11.45 Topic Work/ Literacy/ Numeracy/ICT CREATING PACKAGING	10.45 - 11.45 Topic Work/ Literacy/ Numeracy /ICT EVALUATION
11.45- 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading	11.45 - 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading	11.45 - 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading	11.45 - 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading	11.45 - 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading
Lunchtime	Lunchtime	Lunchtime	Lunchtime	Lunchtime
1.20 - 3.00 Topic Work INTRO TO D&T WORK - RESEARCH IDEAS	1.20 - 3.00 Topic Work/ Numeracy FPT MAKING NETS	1.20 - 2.20 P.E 2.20 - 3.00 Numeracy NUMBER CRUNCH CRISP 2.45 - 3.10 SEN group reading/literacy and numeracy task	1.20 - 3.00 Topic Work/ Literacy/ Numeracy/ICT CREATING PACKAGING	1.20 - 2.10 P.E 2.20 - 3.00 PaPaPaa! QUIZ 4b
3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries	3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries	3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries	3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries	3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries

Figure 3a: Chocolate Project Timetable Week One

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
9.00 - 9.30 Register/dinners Silent reading	9.00- 9.30 Register/dinners Silent reading	9.00 - 9.15 Register/Dinners 9.15 - 9.30 Church	9.00- 9.30 Register/dinners Silent reading	9.00- 9.30 Register/dinners Silent reading
9.30 - 10.30 Literacy/ICT WRITING AN ADVERTISEMENT	9.30 - 10.30 Literacy/ICT WRITING AN ADVERTISEMENT	9.30 - 10.30 Topic Art and Design/ ICT COLLAGE PRODUCTION	9.30 - 10.30 Literacy/Music WRITING A RADIO JINGLE	9.30 - 10.30 Literacy POETRY COMPARISON
Playtime	Playtime	Playtime	Playtime	Playtime
10.45 - 11.45 Literacy/ ICT WRITING AN ADVERTISEMENT	10.45 - 11.45 Topic Art and Design/ICT INTRO TO MIXED MEDIA COLLAGE PROJECT - RESEARCH	10.45 - 11.45 Art and Design/ ICT FINAL COLLAGE PRODUCTION AND RATIONALE	10.45 - 11.45 Literacy/Music WRITING A RADIO JINGLE	10.45 - 11.45 Literacy POETRY WRITING
11.45- 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading	11.45 - 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading	11.45 - 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading	11.45 - 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading	11.45 - 12.20 Grammar/Spelling/ Group Reading
Lunchtime	Lunchtime	Lunchtime	Lunchtime	Lunchtime
1.20 - 3.00 Topic Work/ Numeracy SCALE & RATIO - ENLARGING DESIGNS	1.20 - 3.00 INITIAL IDEAS - SKETCHING. PLANNING AND COLLECTING RESOURCES	1.20 - 2.20 P.E 2.20 - 3.00 Numeracy MONEY WORD PROBLEMS 2.45 - 3.10 SEN group reading/literacy and numeracy task	1.20 - 3.00 FINALISING TOPIC WORK READY TO PRESENT	1.20 - 2.10 P.E 2.20 - 3.00 FINAL EVALUATION OF WHOLE PROJECT/ WORK PRESENTATION
3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries	3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries	3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries	3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries	3.00 - 3.10 Think Book Entries

Figure 3b: Chocolate Project Timetable Week Two

Addressing creativity

Would such an alternative model allow teachers to explore more creative learning and teaching methods and encourage greater levels of engagement on behalf of the pupils? Having suggested considerable changes to the curriculum by implementing a project-based model, substantial change was also observed in the teaching style and approaches used by the class teacher.

Prior to the implementation of the project-based model Robert was observed delivering a variety of lessons to his class of mixed ability Year 5/6 pupils. He was a popular charismatic (Weber, 1947) teacher, having developed a well-deserved reputation for having an excellent rapport with his pupils. He appeared unafraid to break from traditional teaching approaches outside of structured teaching time, chatting freely with the pupils and demonstrating a keen understanding of children's popular culture. In contrast the timetable, materials and methods used within lesson time were representative of many KS2 classrooms. The literacy and numeracy hours followed the prescribed content requirements and were of a predominantly didactic instructional format with pupils working individually for a short period before a plenary concluded the lesson. Work carried out in the afternoon tended to cover the foundation subjects and was generally taught in a similar way. What was happening within this small village school is perhaps no less typical than any other primary school in the Britain today (Richards, 2000, Pollard, 2000, Wragg, 2003). During the project period however, Robert was required to use materials which had no obvious subject specific content and which encouraged flexibility in his teaching strategies. As a result the lesson structure and teaching approach appeared to change radically.

No longer was he positioned at the front of an attentive class giving out a set of facts to be remembered or wandering around a classroom of diligently working pupils giving instructions and advice, as previously seen. Robert began to adopt a very different role as the field notes recorded: 'Robert no longer stands in front of the class and has moved his desk to the side. He seems to be talking from many different places in the room which make him seem much more integrated.' (Haffenden, 2003:47) This new role required him to 'support' in a room where pupils were talking independently where the hum of heated debate was taking place, where decisions were being made without the help of a teacher. The children rarely deviated from the set activity, which so often happens when pupils perceive the teacher giving less than 100% of his/her direct attention to the class. Pupils generally remained on task for longer periods than previously observed, as noted by one member of staff:

There was a real sense of urgency in Michael, which we don't usually see. He rushed into the room and got straight down to the task in hand… I think he needed to print something out. When I asked if he could spare a few minutes to help me with something, he (politely) told me that he really hadn't got time, explaining how he needed to get on' and then he quickly disappeared back to the classroom! Normally Michael would jump at an excuse to avoid getting back to work. (Haffenden, 2003:58)

There was an overall consensus between the staff involved that most of the children had been noticeably motivated and enthused by the project itself. As Ted Wragg suggests:

The best project work has always seized children's imagination, persuading them to work on their topic way beyond the constraining confines of their classroom. (Wragg, T. 2002:52)

During one observation a group of pupils discussed the subject area, asking each other questions, which they each in turn attempted to answer. It was obvious, as I eavesdropped, that there was no assumption that Robert had the 'answers' and the children seemed happy to debate and discuss the issue in question without the required help of a teacher. What it seems Robert may have achieved is the presentation of 'work' in the form of shared learning experiences (Barnes, 1979, Wragg 2000). Learning which does not necessarily require right or wrong answers but learning which needs to be 'experienced' rather than 'corrected'. What is suggested here as significant is that 'teaching' appeared to be more about 'supported learning' than 'delivering knowledge' and that 'being on task' no longer required Robert to take a lead role of 'teacher in charge'. A point supported by (Gross, N. et al 1971:274) who claim:

Children learn better if teachers, while being responsible for structuring the environment, act within that structure more as guides and assistants to the learners rather than instructors in the traditional sense.

As the study progressed, this new role predominated and Robert began to shift in his reflective referral of the pupils from predominant use of 'they' to 'we':

what is important is that we are able to develop it (the content) as we go along. Because we could see that there was a need to add other things in and we could see that some things were going really well and others need to be added. (Haffenden, 2003:48)

The above is particularly significant as it refers to an occasion where it was the pupils who negotiated a change in the planned sessions. Robert, in his new role as 'guide', saw little problem in giving pupils an opportunity to share in the planning process:

I did give them a choice a lot of the time so that meant we all had more of a say in the work which I think is something I've learnt to be more flexible with now - giving slightly more choice. (Haffenden, 2003:48)

In conclusion did this change to the curriculum require Robert to perceive his role differently and what was the effect on his perception of the teaching role once the project had ended? In answer to both these questions Robert's own words during an interview that took place six weeks after the project had finished provides an answer:

I've always tried to make them independent but I was actually surprised just how independent they could be and that was completely because I was teaching in such a different way. I think that's something I've done far more since the project. I have allowed them more freedom because they don't always see me as 'in charge'… Which is something I've been quite surprised at 'cos normally the plan was there and I/they would have to stick to it. I would deviate sometimes but not too much and now I'm able to deviate and I don't see any harm in it 'cos there seems to be far more learning that comes from this. (Haffenden, 2003:49)

In analysing this apparent shift of both perception and practice it seems that creativity in relation to teaching is often curtailed by a sense of compliance. By adopting a less orthodox approach to the curriculum and by valuing rather than marginalizing the potential of subjects like design and technology, we may provide opportunities to enthuse and motivate teachers as well as pupils.

Such an approach offers an alternative perspective that therefore demands consideration in the light of the current context.

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