

# 1 Context

## 1.1 Connecting REFLECT to the wider national context

At the end of November 2006 Tessa Jowell, then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), announced that The Sage Gateshead had been awarded £345,000 of Creative Partnerships funding to develop a national co-mentoring programme which concludes in July 2008.

Although rooted in the recent developmental work promoted by Creative Partnerships, the **REFLECT** pilot programme offers a further dimension to the many different forms of collaborative practice between teachers, community workers and creative practitioners that have been growing over the last 30 years or more. Acknowledging the strategic significance of such partnerships, the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE, 1999, pp.120-139) made the following recommendations regarding joint programmes of professional development for teachers and artists. It proposed that the DCMS and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) should:

- establish a national programme of advanced in-service training for artists, scientists and other creative professionals to work in partnership with formal and informal education;
- fund a number of pilot projects involving cultural organisations and education providers to investigate practical ways of training artists and teachers to work in partnership (p.164, para. ix).

With its commitment to working towards a 'national strategy for creative and cultural education' (p.6, para.ii) the NACCCE Report, *All Our Futures*, served as a springboard for the birth of Creative Partnerships in 2002. Right from the beginning, the development of high quality collaborative professional learning was placed at the centre of its programme. This was emphasised in the evaluation of Creative Partnerships *Continuing Professional Development* by Oxford Brookes University (see Wood, 2005, pp. 9 -12), which recommended that effective professional learning should involve:

- longer-term Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities, especially if peer support and mentoring is provided;
- intellectually challenging opportunities for teachers and creative practitioners to conduct research and reflect on practice, choosing their own focus;
- the active support of school leadership teams;
- high quality provision with dissemination and feedback arrangements designed to effect sustained change;
- provision to embed the changed practice, particularly in schools;
- the planning of outcomes which contribute to the capacity of the creative, cultural and education sectors to promote creative learning and teaching;
- the measurement or recording of forms of impact.

These recommendations were underpinned by research that has also informed the thinking underlying the REFLECT programme. For example, in 2003 the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) published findings that identified the key characteristics of collaborative forms of professional development that have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning:


- use of specialist expertise linked to school-based activity;
- peer support or coaching, including observation to provide a safe environment for experimentation;
- scope for participants to identify their own CPD focus and starting points (within a framework);
- processes to encourage, extend and structure professional dialogue, reflection and change;
- processes for sustaining CPD over time (Cordingley et al, 2003; EPPI Review, 2005; also referenced in Wood, 2005, p.10)

This view of professional learning has been developed further by Creative Partnerships and the following principles, articulated in an internal paper, resonate with the emerging philosophy and practice of **REFLECT**. For example:

- the importance of questioning and challenging - encouraging enquiry-based teaching and learning; providing opportunities for teachers and creative practitioners to pursue their own professional learning focus and learning styles
- the importance of connecting and collaborating - building a shared learning community based on trust, dialogue, parity and mutual respect
- the importance of imagining - engaging practitioners and teachers in their own creativity and creative process; supporting them through creative risk-taking
- the importance of reflecting - providing opportunities for teachers and practitioners to reflect on and analyse their own learning and collaborative practice; encouraging people to seek and construct their own continuing professional development (Creative Partnerships, 2007, para. 2.1).

The pivotal place of reflective, evidence-based collaborative practice is now acknowledged as a critical component in the delivery of the Government's creativity agenda. This is made explicit in Paul Roberts' 2006 paper for the DCMS, *Nurturing Creativity in Young People: A report to Government to inform future policy*, where it maintains that effective continuing professional development requires:

- sustained process rather than one-off intervention;
- strong peer support;
- a clear focus on students' learning and teachers' practice;
- the support of external expertise, linked to school-based activity (pp.47 - 48).



The Report emphasises that the most effective approach to promoting creativity in schools is to provide forms of professional learning that involve “peer-to-peer reflective practice, based on action research (p.48)”. In addition, ‘practitioner partnerships’ are seen as central to any coherent system of professional development. The Report clearly states that:

Action research is in itself a powerful model of professional development, and its underpinning basis of collaborative, reflective practice is central to the style of partnership described in this paper and offers a model for systematic future development (Roberts, 2006, p.54).

Examples of initiatives that successfully embody these principles include the ‘Creativity Action Research Awards’ (CARA) and the ‘Teacher Artist Partnership Programme’ (TAPP). The CARA programmes took place between 2005 and March 2008. The programme was managed by CapeUK for Creative Partnerships and mentoring was seen as an important element in each programme. This initiative brought together classroom teachers and creative practitioners to investigate, through creativity-based projects, the effect that creativity can have on pupil learning and motivation. Almost 150 schools were involved from all over the country with each partnership awarded £4,500 to fund their research in addition to being offered the support of a separately funded mentor with expertise in creativity, education and research. CARA programmes worked in all areas of the curriculum, harnessing the skills of a wide range of creative practitioners, including architects, philosophers, scientists and broadcasters (see Creative Partnerships, 2005 and CapeUK, 2005).

Another significant personal and professional development initiative for artists and teachers was the Teacher Artist Partnership Programme (TAPP) which grew out of the LIFT Teacher Forum and the Animarts Report (2003). Since 2006 TAPP has been managed by CapeUK and its evaluation has been conducted by Proactive Learning from Early Years (see PLEY, 2007). As is indicated in the Evaluation Report, “TAPP can be viewed in the context of current government policies concerning opening up schooling to the cultural resources of the community, with its strong emphasis on supporting teacher artist partnerships and determining the conditions under which they might operate successfully (p.1)”.

The approach adopted by TAPP exemplifies the best practice advocated by Paul Roberts in his Report to Government (2006): i.e., ‘peer-to-peer reflective practice based on action research’. The mode of learning in TAPP is reflective, exploratory and participant-centred, supported by an informed analysis of the complex circumstances embedded in their respective partnerships (PLEY, 2007, (pp.1 - 2). The rigour of its approach has enabled it to become an award-bearing programme as part of the Graduate Diploma in Professional Studies at the University of London, Institute of Education. Although mentoring may not have played a major role in TAPP, its success is due partly to the depth, quality and integrity of the reflective dialogue that has taken place within each partnership.

This principle of reflective collaborative dialogue is also now seen as integral to developing partnerships between Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) and schools. MLA has designed a placement programme, 'Learning Links', for teachers and sector staff to work in partnership. It operates in each of the nine English regions as part of the Strategic Commissioning programme (see MLA, 2007). To prepare sector staff to work with teachers, MLA has developed a self-assessment framework which is aligned with the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Common Core of Skills for the Children's Workforce. The idea behind the MLA framework is to support sector staff to gain appropriate skills and knowledge to work in schools but also to understand education vocabulary and context. Although 'Learning Links' does not contain an explicit mentoring component, its effectiveness partly depends on teachers and sector staff building up collaborative partnerships based on reflective dialogue, shared vocabulary and mutual understanding.

In the evaluation of the Museums and Galleries Strategic Commissioning Programme, the benefits of strengthening collaborative dialogue through extending partnerships to include creative practitioners as well as teachers and sector staff are made explicit.

Where museum, archive and gallery staff have worked with other professionals, including visual artists, performers, poets, web designers and independent museum educators, there have been benefits beyond a simple sharing of skills. By bringing their expertise to planning and conception of projects as well as to delivery, these creative agents have acted as a catalyst for the cultural sector staff. In the most successful projects a three-way partnership has been developed between host venue staff, creative practitioners and teachers. In these cases all three partners contribute valuable skills and resources which result in a richer learning experience for pupils (MLA, 2007, p.22).


## 1.2 Partnerships and cross-sector mentoring

These research-based initiatives have helped to demonstrate the creative possibilities arising from collaborative practice but they have also indicated the potential power of mentoring in the context of professional learning. Several examples will be taken to illustrate recent developments.

In January 2003 the Directors of Creative Partnerships London East and London South commissioned Arts Inform to design, establish, manage and evaluate a creative and cultural mentoring programme for teachers in the Creative Partnerships schools in their areas. The pilot programme ran from Autumn 2003 to Summer 2004, with a second round from Autumn 2004 to Summer 2005 and it was guided by principles identified by the National Mentoring Network (see NMN, 2002). The evaluation of the pilot phase concluded that:

One-to-one mentoring of teachers by key players from creative and cultural organisations provided professional development for both sides of the mentoring partnership, was highly motivating for many of the individuals involved, and was an important means of promoting inter-organisational learning (Arts Inform, September 2004, p.1).





This approach to mentoring was developed further by Arts Inform when it was commissioned by Arts Council England, East Midlands and Creative Partnerships to run another pilot creative and cultural mentoring programme for teachers in the East Midlands in collaboration with The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT). The programme ran from September 2005 to July 2006 with the evaluation finding this kind of mentoring partnership:

an effective mechanism for enhancing the use of creativity in curriculum delivery, enabling individual teachers to work with and experience the work of practitioners in the creative and cultural industries in their areas, and of providing opportunities for professional development to both sides of the partnership (Arts Inform, October 2006, p.1).

The importance of cross-sector mentoring was picked up by Tessa Brooks (2006) in her *Coaching and Mentoring Report* for the Cultural Leadership Programme (CLP) (Arts Council England, MLA and Creative and Cultural Skills [CCS]). Commenting on the Creative Partnerships/Arts Inform Mentoring Programme, Brooks points out that its evaluation “has shown it to be successful for both mentors and mentees, but given its aim of strengthening the delivery of key tasks in the work of schools, its relevance to the development of the cultural sector needs to be explored further (p.15)”. In her recommendations Brooks emphasises the importance of promoting mentoring “between sub-sectors, as well as between the cultural sector and other sectors (p.22)”.

The need to strengthen cross-sector dialogue is now widely acknowledged. For example, strong interest in the potential of co-mentoring was shown by the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2007) in their Report on *Creative Partnerships and the Curriculum*.

Continuing professional development is of fundamental importance to embedding more creative approaches to teaching and learning, and should be seen as the core of the operation. We also encourage Creative Partnerships to consider ways in which mentoring of teachers by creative professionals, and of creative professionals by teachers, could be further encouraged - for example, through the introduction of short, structured sabbaticals for teachers (pp.3 - 4).

Similarly, in the McMaster Review (2008), *Supporting Excellence in the Arts*, it is recognised that artists and practitioners should be given every opportunity throughout their careers to continue to develop their artistic practice and capacity for innovation and risk-taking (p.15). Again, mentoring is seen as one of four important elements that best support talented practitioners:

- personalised support from mentors;
- networking and exposure to the work of others at home and abroad;
- time, space and resources to experiment and develop practice, equivalent to research and development in other sectors;
- the funding system actively seeking out and supporting individual artists and producers (p.14).

The Cultural Leadership Programme (CLP) publication, *Meeting the Challenge: leadership development in the cultural and creative industries* (see Devlin et al, 2008, p.38), emphasises 'work-based learning opportunities' as key, citing several major studies (including studies by the University of Reading for the National College for School Leadership [NCSL] and a study of school leadership in the USA by Professor Amin Rjan [1996]) that indicate the most valuable of these to be mentoring and coaching. These findings are reflected in the development of mentoring as part of the CLP work-based learning strand.

The launch of the Creative and Cultural Skills website, *Creative Choices*, in April 2008 has the potential to give access to tools, knowledge and networks to help develop skills for anyone either wanting to, or already working in the creative industries. CC Skills plan to develop a Mentoring and Coaching Bank as part of the site in the future.


This challenge to the professional arts community has been further reiterated by John Holden (2008) in his consultation paper for DEMOS, *Culture and Learning: Towards a New Agenda*. The fundamental question is raised as to "how can an effective, coherent and wide-ranging programme of continuing professional development be created for teachers, cultural educators, artists and museum professionals (p.33)"? The paper argues that if arts and culture are to form a central part of everyone's education, far more attention needs to be given to the continuing personal and professional development of creative practitioners.

Training opportunities for artists and museum professionals need to be extended and improved, enabling them to work in a range of contexts both within and beyond the classroom. Artists' CPD should stress the benefits to artistic practice gained from interaction with new audiences in new contexts; it should also encourage cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural activities (p.33).

The **REFLECT** national co-mentoring programme is seen by Holden as one way forwards in strengthening and nurturing constructive dialogue between teachers and creative practitioners (pp.15; 19 - 20).

### 1.3 Co-mentoring and the principle of 'conversation'

The current interest in co-mentoring between education and the cultural sector has been identified by Creative Partnerships as an area of development that could fruitfully be connected to the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (see CUREE, 2005a). This Framework is increasingly used by teachers, schools and their numerous partners and serves as a benchmark for good practice. Designed by the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education, as part of its Mentoring and Coaching CPD Capacity Building Project, the Framework has the imprimatur of the DCSF (Department of Children, Schools and Families), TDA (Training and Development Agency for Schools) GTC (General Teaching Council for England), NCSL (National College for School Leadership), QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), and the Primary and Secondary National Strategies. If cross-sector mentoring is going to become an effective form of collaboration between



teachers and creative practitioners, meaningful connections will have to be explored and made explicit within the Framework.

The aim of the Mentoring and Coaching Project was “to develop clarity about the nature of effective mentoring and coaching in order to secure coherence, excellence and a positive impact on teaching and learning in the next phase of the development of a national CPD strategy (CUREE, 2005b, p.2)”. It proposed that effective mentoring and coaching in an educational context involves the following core principles:

- a learning conversation;
- a thoughtful relationship;
- a learning agreement;
- combining support from colleagues and specialists;
- growing self-direction;
- setting challenging and personal goals;
- understanding why different approaches work;
- acknowledging the benefits to mentors and coaches;
- experimenting and observation;
- using resources effectively (CUREE, 2007, p.15).

The Project also identifies the core concepts and skills that are fundamental to mentoring, specialist coaching and collaborative co-coaching. The one area that remains to be examined is that of co-mentoring in a cross-sector context. That is the main purpose of the **REFLECT** pilot programme. Not surprisingly, both projects share a commitment to certain principles and processes. For example:

- developing evidence-based reflective conversation;
- building up a trusting, mutually supportive relationship;
- establishing boundaries within a shared learning agreement;
- strengthening a sense of responsibility for deepening and extending professional learning;
- being able to adapt and connect this learning to different contexts;
- creating a learning environment that supports risk-taking and innovation and is underpinned by evidence-based reflective practice.

From all the developmental work of bodies like Creative Partnerships, CUREE, CapeUK, The Sage Gateshead and others, one key principle constitutes the bedrock of effective mentoring and co-mentoring: the potential power of ‘conversation’ - that is, critically reflective dialogue that connects to its context and is grounded in evidence-based practice.

The transformational capacity of conversation is taken as a starting point by Creative Partnerships London North (2007) in its publication *Exploring the Impact of Creative Learning on Artists and Practitioners*. In the Foreword Theodore Zeldin makes some penetrating observations about creativity and partnership that resonate with the process of co-mentoring. He argues that “the key to a more adventurous kind of creativity requires not so much self-awareness as partnership (p.5)” - strengthening our capacity to see ourselves and the world through other people’s eyes.

When two people learn from each other as equals, they are changing the world, because they are adding something to it that did not exist before, another particle of mutual understanding. ....So the question is no longer, ‘Who am I?’ but ‘Who are you?’ (CPLN, 2007, p.6).

It is through this creative engagement with another person - through a meeting of minds, through reflective conversation - that we enter the kind of transformational journey that is hoped will accrue for co-mentors during the **REFLECT** programme. Zeldin’s concept of conversation could well serve as a leitmotif that runs through **REFLECT**:

Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don’t just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn’t just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards (ibid. p.6).

Two observations from the testimonies of **REFLECT** co-mentors illustrate Zeldin’s point about the potential power of conversation:

My co-mentor used story to facilitate a reflective conversation which helped me understand my relationship with my own creativity, deepening my understanding of myself and my personal and professional journey. This proved an ideal exercise for uncovering professional direction (**Headteacher**).

The **REFLECT** programme has had an impact on my personal creative practice by providing an exchange which has focused on process in an often outcome-centred educational context. Having the ‘space’ to talk, think, relax and share perspectives with another professional has enriched my thinking, motivation and creative practice (**Creative Practitioner**).