

## Creative curriculum

**“You can’t just be creative on Friday afternoon, when all the ‘proper work’ has been finished.”**

The view of Chris Chivers, a special needs coordinator and former headteacher, struck a chord with school leaders who took part in a Leadership Network discussion on creativity in talk2learn. Many agreed that allowing children the latitude to work creatively opened up new dimensions to their learning right across the curriculum.

Some schools had seized on a revamp of their curriculum as an opportunity to put creativity at the heart of the whole system.

Richard Sutton-Smith’s large primary school has abandoned subjects and now builds all its thematic and cross-curricular work around four faculties: Basic Skills, Arts, Technologies and Humanities/ Values. Staff begin each term with a creative and cross-curricular brainstorm then flesh out the plans for each subject area.

“These plans are aimed to motivate pupils,” he said. “In our context, a vital part has been to introduce an extended homework task for every other topic to draw on the power and excitement of home learning.”

One note of caution was sounded by Jane Donati, headteacher of an infant and nursery school, who warned against unbridled enthusiasm for ‘creativity’ in the absence of a concrete definition of what it means in teaching and learning:

“Although I am in favour of creativity in certain fields and as part of independent learning, the term is too wide and open to misinterpretation. Many will remember that it gathered a very bad reputation in the past as it became a licence to let children discover learning and ignored the part of teaching in the whole equation.”

Calvin Kipling, deputy headteacher at a secondary school, also voiced concern. A curriculum which values problem-solving and thinking skills would be entirely appropriate, he agreed, but it is ill-suited to the current regime of testing:



“While the role of tests is not on the table to be debated, we can have as creative a curriculum as we like but if it doesn’t ‘raise standards’ by that measure it will fail.”

But Susan Foster-agg, a first school headteacher, felt that schools should not allow past experience to stand in their way. Her school has WOW days dedicated to getting children enthused about a new work topic, as well as more ‘hands-on’ activities, problem solving and children’s reflections on their learning. A flexible timetable has also been introduced in which subjects are ‘chunked’ together:

“For example in one week staff might teach lessons in geography on fault lines alongside science experiments about how a volcano works, then create clay models of a volcano.

**“Learning is clearer for children and their knowledge base is deeper as a result,”**

she explained. “Creativity can be ‘woolly’ but we now have the national curriculum to ensure that we do not return to the woolly days.”

**If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at [www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities)**