A CREATIVE CALLING

Creative learning brings so much to science-based subjects in the classroom – and in the years to come, writes **SUZY DIXON**

Giving children the chance to be creative helps them to learn

When a school includes creativity as integral to their education, it can be misconstrued as a diverging path from academic studies while the evidence is quite the opposite.

Naturally, teaching creatively can engage a variety of learners. However, the real strength of creativity arises when it is embedded in a knowledge-rich curriculum. For example, to combine science, technology, engineering and mathematics into valuable STEM work, there needs to be considerable knowledge of each of these subjects. Without this deeper understanding, the creative mind and method of learning cannot engage to use logical, critical and innovative thinking to problem solve towards a solution. New ideas, inventions and improvements in procedures and operations come from thinking creatively across areas of expertise with sound knowledge. We know that many businesses require creative thinking in their companies. There is so much evidence of this, such as the collaboration of neuroscientists with educationalists and psychologists to interpret functional MRI (fMRI) scans, which is giving us greater understanding of neural growth, brain plasticity and synaptic pruning.

Taking this directly into the classroom, creative learning is therefore embracing both the breadth and the depth of learning – one cannot work without the other. It is not a conflict between creativity and academic studies, but a mutually supportive combination that enriches learning and outcomes. A good example of this combination is when watching pupils taking part in a debate. A debate requires many stages of acquiring knowledge and critical thinking: learning the discipline of the formal process of debating; thorough research to ensure accuracy based on fact, not opinion; speech writing for the initial stage of the debate; listening skills; public speaking skills; assimilation of facts from the debate while critically dissecting that information and quickly formulating it into a considered, persuasive response.

What I have found particularly exhilarating about these debates is seeing them performed by nine year olds. This should be no surprise at all because actually creativity is at the heart of schooling from the start. Take a look at the level of creative learning that happens within the Early Years programme at the age of four where they are constantly joining processes together and learning at an astonishing speed. Then Key Stage One maintains this creativity embedded in the curriculum while timetables, spelling and reading are beginning to be mastered. It is only later in an education system focused on learning facts to pass examinations where learning becomes more restricted.

The creative subjects themselves are known to be beneficial to learning – again, fMRI scans have shown the brain activity required for these.

It is a shame that many state schools are finding themselves restricted in how much they can develop their creative curriculum. Well over 50 per cent of the Royal College of Music's intake are from independent schools, while only seven per cent of children come from the independent sector. This says a lot about being given creative opportunities, and the sad loss to too many of our population of the chance to shine at something that might have been their true talent.

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