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## **iJade Hybrid Spaces: Re-imagining pedagogy, practice and research**

### **Theme: Creativity and Wellbeing**

#### **Abstract | Re-imagining Learning | Spaces of Possibility**

New spaces of possibility are opening up in the light of the pandemic, with a shared purpose to offer an alternative, creative approach to learning and researching experimental sites for pedagogical innovation. In our partnership work, our creative methodology, with everyone an artist, drives the ambition for artistic excellence. These new blended spaces, engage artists and educators in creative and reflective practice that places the arts, culture and creativity at the heart of a future pedagogy. These spaces can be interrogated to distil a repertoire of creative pedagogical characteristics that optimise agency, freedom, choice and imagination.

#### **Re-imagining Learning | Spaces of Possibility**

##### **Introduction**

New spaces of possibility are opening up in the light of the pandemic, with a shared purpose to offer an alternative, creative approach to learning and researching experimental sites for pedagogical innovation. We need a paradigm shift in arts education. This pandemic is teaching us to think about things differently, to act differently and to work together to solve extremely complex problems on behalf of society, the world. The crisis is creating exceptional circumstances and causing a massive yet creative disruption in education. Social justice, the arts and creative learning are now more important than ever. There is a renewed focus on community, on the experience of time and space for artistic creation. We have the opportunity to create new and alternative models of education. We need to re-think.

At the heart of change is creativity. Human beings have an infinite capacity for creativity. Creativity is the highest form of intelligence, to pursue something new, to generate and create ideas and solutions, alternatives and possibilities. It is multi-dimensional and multi

interdisciplinary. It is about asking questions and having the imagination to do things differently. Creativity does not just belong to the arts. It is about how we use our minds in all areas of our lives. It is our capacity to innovate which will help us make the most of our complex world to create a positive future. Teaching creatively and teaching for creativity will generate creative learning in the arts that is being lost by a reductionist and performance led curriculum.

Arts education in the UK is under pressure. It is dominated by an instrumental, economic and marketised narrative, expressed in terms of a performance-led agenda, and prioritising tests, measurements and grades over authentic and self-directed enquiry. The English Education system does not overtly value a creative and arts-based approach. Instead we need to instil in students a passion for enquiry and imagination, to value their agency, interests and fascinations (Craft *et al.* 2014). So maybe this is the time for drawing on our collective imagination to rethink our education system in response to this crisis, to place children and young people at the heart of this process, rather than national performance-led data. All children, no matter what their background or circumstance, deserve a high quality creative and cultural education.

This is where the arts have a significant role to play. ‘Engagement with the arts, creativity and culture plays a crucial role in our cognitive and affective development’ (Hay 2018:1). Creating art invites a unique way of seeing and being in the world to make meaning, embracing creativity and critical thinking to express our thoughts ideas and feelings, our personal and cultural identities. Each art form has its own integrity and characteristics - the arts provide ways of saying things that often cannot be said in other ways. Arts experiences enable children to understand that the imagination and its development are not marginal but central to the development of the individual and society. Habits of mind are developed through learning in and about the arts – to be curious, playful, intuitive and sensitive (*ibid*). Children spontaneously and creatively connect different forms of thinking and expression (*ibid*), in ‘a hundred languages’ (Malaguzzi in Edwards *et al.* 1998:23).

‘Care, compassion and empathy developed through respectful relationships are essential conditions for creative learning, happiness and well-being. Investing in creative learning and children’s wellbeing surely means we will have happier adults and a happier society. The attitudes, values and skills that we learn in childhood stay with us for the rest of our

lives' (Hay 2018:1) – 'they are vital ingredients in the well-being of children and adults alike, but we need to protect the special place the arts have in children's lives' (Hay 2020:1). We need to invite children to follow their fascinations, to find their intrinsic motivation to learn through self-directed enquiry, alongside adults that care.

New spaces are opening up to do things differently in the light of the current tragedy, with a shared purpose to offer an alternative, creative approach to learning and researching experimental sites for pedagogical innovation. In our partnership work, our creative methodology, with everyone an artist, drives the ambition for artistic excellence. By prioritising a more flexible concept of education through curiosity and creativity, together with the capacity for the arts to invite 'possibility thinking' (Craft *et al*, 2015:39) through a creative and critical pedagogy (Hay and Paris 2020:69).

Biesta argues that 'the real educational work is about bringing children and young people into dialogue with the world (Biesta 2017a:37) in an educational space as a way of existing, of being and paying attention to the '*quality* of what and who is being expressed, a quality that has to do with how children and can exist *well*, individually and collectively, *in* the world and *with* the world' (Biesta 2017c:15). Education should open up 'existential possibilities', including possibilities 'beyond learning: different ways of being', of existing, and ways of existing differently (ibid). Biesta argues for the importance of creating space for establishing a relationship with our desires and fascinations, and the unique potential of the arts and aesthetic experience. It is working through the experience of art as a dialogue, as an expression of being human in the world, as an encounter between desires and materiality, that allows children to express their voice, make their own sense, be creative, generate subjective meaning and articulate their own unique identity.

Challenging standardised ways of thinking and inviting artists and educators to enter new spaces of possibility, create liminal spaces that offer new opportunities for learning and for responding to social issues in our ever-changing environment. Atkinson has proposed that an event or intervention is a radical disruption (Atkinson 2012). So, it is through a rupture to prior thinking that the subject can reach new truths. Atkinson explains that it is in this state of disruption that one can be led to uncertainty and not knowing, which leads then to an emancipated state of real learning.

Adopting an *interruptive* pedagogy (Atkinson 2011) offers resistance in order for art to come in to presence – to emerge. Atkinson contests the notion of understanding art through established knowledge and practice (Atkinson 2019), and invites a focus on ‘the force of art challenging us to think’ (Atkinson 2017:141), to consider the dynamic process of learning itself. Atkinson recommends a ‘*pedagogical reversal*, whereby external transcendent lenses and their respective knowledge and criteria for practice are relaxed’, resulting in a pedagogy ‘without criteria’ (Atkinson 2017:143) or prescription. This in turn encourages the expansion of all our creative learning capacity. These spaces of possibility create cultural connections for learners may never have otherwise engaged with these opportunities for expression.

### **House of Imagination**

House of Imagination is a space of possibility. We invite creative disruption with purposeful risk in relation to creative practice. House of Imagination is a concept, a studio environment for children and young people to collaborate with creative professionals. It is a home for improvisation, creativity and innovation and a place to make these visible through research. House of Imagination is a research organisation with a focus on understanding, nurturing and inspiring children’s and young people’s creative and critical thinking. At its heart is co-enquiry between children, teachers and creative professionals. These shared research enquiries are underpinned by a clear set of principles and invite continuous developing creative and critically reflective practice through participatory action research.

House of Imagination is driven by a desire for change in both children’s lives and in schools, focusing on an exploration of the possibilities that creativity offers. Children need more opportunities to develop their creativity and to experiment and teachers need more support to integrate these skills. Through research and dissemination House of Imagination provides evidence for educational and cultural change, helping to build a strong cultural ecology that in turn supports children, schools and creative professionals.

‘House of Imagination involves multi-professional teams working in partnership to support children and young people in environments of enquiry, challenging orthodoxies and developing new ways of thinking’ (Hay *et al* 2020:94). House of Imagination involves a creative team: with visual artists, musicians, dancers, theatre makers, live artists, creative

writers, poets and other creative professionals as mathematicians, scientists and philosophers (Hay and Paris 2020:69).

House of Imagination works with children and young people, artists and educators to invite 'learning everywhere', both in school and in the city as a 'campus for learning' (Hay *et al* 2020:94). House of Imagination is committed to ensuring that every child, no matter what their background or circumstance has access to an authentic arts education (ibid). Central to this vision is children's perception of their own identity as artists and how the arts can be transformational in their lives (Hay and Paris 2020:70). Children working as artists allows children to have opportunities for exploration, to 'find and follow their fascinations', stimulating the imagination and encouraging creative thinking. This approach integrates a creative and reflective pedagogy, with research at the heart of the process (Hay *et al* 2020:95).

### **Artistic practice is educational**

Joseph Beuys' (1972) statement that *everyone is an artist* drives this work. The artistic action is through thinking and making. Engaging with contemporary arts practice as everyday activism contests the instrumentalization of the arts as mere tools to support other subject areas. Excellent arts education engages children and young people in authentic learning experiences to express and communicate their ideas and feelings in multi-modal ways. A creative, inclusive pedagogy immerses children and young people in experiential learning, valuing their agency and interests. Children will find their own voice through different art forms to express themselves and make meaning, to make sense of the world. Creative co-enquiry invites creative and critical thinking and supports both cognitive and affective development, learning in, about and through the arts. Children and young people can explore diverse creative enquiries as part of an emergent curriculum, alongside adults who give quality attention to children and support their development as artists. The arts have the power to be transformative and should be central to young people's lives.

### **Children as artists**

Art is a human right and is an innate capacity in all of us. Inspired by the practice in Reggio Emilia, Italy, the image of the child is creative, competent and connected (Malaguzzi in

Edwards *et al.* 1998). In this context, all children and young people should have access to high quality arts education, no matter what their background or circumstance.

*Children as artists: how can adults support children's learning identity as artists?* (Hay 2019) draws on collaborative research with 5x5x5=creativity, with particular attention given to four elements of support identified in 5x5x5=creativity current research as creative values (ethos and priorities of adults), creative environments (emotional climate, time, space, resources), creative relationships (between adults and children) and creative dispositions (behaviours, skills and capacities) and how these may support an individual child's developing identity as an artist (Hay 2019b:1).

Inspired by the practice in Reggio Emilia with the image of the child as powerful, inspiring and intelligent human beings in their own right (Hay in Goodliffe 2017:88). Very young children have powerful ideas, immersed in a natural symbolic and artistic language, with art as research, and research as art. When children are in the flow, they are immersed in possibility and their imagination is infinite.

Findings from the study have led to a distillation of pedagogical characteristics that support a child's learning identity as an artist and include recommendations for a repertoire of creative pedagogy. These signal the role of the adult as a 'companion' in the child's learning, valuing self-directed enquiry related to the notion of heutagogy (rather than adults' prescriptions) and with an emphasis on the child's developing ideas and self-concept as an artist (Hay 2019b:1).

### **The role of the adult alongside children and young people and the importance of developing a creative pedagogy.**

Key characteristics of a creative pedagogy include a focus on co-enquiry and co-construction, attention to creative dispositions, learner agency, the quality and rigour of learning, open-ended activities and multi-modal learning. This approach highlights the importance of an emergent curriculum, rather than one that is prescriptive, co-designing arts-based enquiries using the city/village as a campus for learning and an experimental pedagogical site. Signature projects include School Without Walls which prioritises creativity, critical thinking and co-enquiry. Artists and educators work alongside the children as 'companions in learning' (Bancroft *et al* 2008) to facilitate meaningful, creative

enquiries. Everyone has a sketchbook to develop visual inquiry and collaborative co-enquiry (Hay 2019a).

Figure 1. School Without Walls at the egg theatre Bath

**School Without Walls co-designing arts-based enquiries using the city/village as a campus for learning and an experimental pedagogical site.**

‘School Without Walls creates an opportunity for educators to think about teaching and learning differently - to inspire learning everywhere, beyond the school walls. This environment of enquiry transforms learning for both teachers and children. The approach is underpinned by a clear set of principles developed with 5x5x5=creativity’ (Hay 2019a:1). ‘Children are engaged in the cultural life of the place where they live as active citizens and stewards of the environment, helping children become confident and progressive thinkers, who feel a deep sense of connection and purpose’ (Hay *et al* 2020:95).

Careful observation, documentation and analysis of these learning experiences inform shared enquiries with children and young people; negotiating different ways of expressing and communicating their ideas. The quality of attention of the adults is crucial in this process in order to make the learning visible (e.g. to parents, educators, Ofsted) and inform responsive planning. There is constant reflection, review and rigorous collaboration between the adult team (artists, educators, practitioners from cultural centres and mentors) who share their creative expertise. This ensures continuous high quality professional development for the teachers, developing practice through action research.

Giving children and young people responsibility for their own learning, as active citizens, develops a repertoire of ‘learning to learn’ skills and competencies, and deepens their knowledge and understanding of the world. This has shown increased motivation, purposeful engagement, authentic learning and social empowerment. As learners, they develop their capabilities to be effective and confident communicators, to cooperate and collaborate well. In summary, creativity, responsibility, reflection and relationships are at the heart of this process. Developing a high quality, inclusive pedagogy is key to the success of the work in order to embed creative and reflective practice (Hay *et al* 2020:95).

Figure 2. School Without Walls in the city of Bath as a campus for learning



## Forest of Imagination

Forest of Imagination, co-founded with House of Imagination and Grant Associates, is a pop-up contemporary arts and architecture and creative learning event in Bath that reimagines public spaces in the city and invites everyone to explore their own imagination and creativity, highlighting the power of nature to inspire. Forest of Imagination deliberately brings nature and creativity to the heart of the public realm and the inspirational experience and sensations of wildness to our doorsteps (Hay *et al* 2020:96-7).

*‘Forest is the home of Imagination. Imagination is everyone. Forest of Imagination shines a light on the importance of global forests, the capacity of Bath as a creative ecosystem, the natural wonder of the city and above all the capacity of Forests to inspire creativity in everyone.’* Andrew Grant, Grant Associates

Forest of Imagination is creative, community driven, participatory and inclusive. Forest of Imagination invites everyone to have a conversation about the importance of creativity, imagination and nature in a playful immersive environment for all ages. Forest of Imagination is a contemporary and participatory arts event and creative learning programme co-designed with artists and creative professionals. Each year the team reimagines a familiar space to inspire everyone’s imagination and heighten our connectedness to nature in an urban environment (Hay *et al* 2020:96-7).

Forest of Imagination reveals the collaborative and creative ecology of the city in a new and engaging way and makes creativity and nature visible in the community. The city becomes a place for new approaches to learning. Artistic and architectural installations connect the natural and urban landscapes with creative experiences (Hay *et al* 2020:97). Children and adults are invited to explore and learn outside the classroom. The Forest of Imagination invites a new space of possibility and to invite conversations about the importance of creativity, nature, wellbeing and imagination in our lives.

### Figure 3. Forest of Imagination Drawing Machines

Every year Forest of Imagination draws on local skills, inspiration and ingenuity and engaged a wide public audience. This creative placemaking involves meaningful and experiential ‘real world’ learning, engaging different communities in co-creation of natural

and immersive spaces in an urban context. Forest of Imagination gives children and people of all ages chances to experiment creatively and to experience the city differently. This work encompasses educational, creative and cultural approaches that are intuitive and responsive to the natural environment through local engagement but with wider impact in society (Hay *et al* 2020:97). Forest of Imagination highlights the importance of creative placemaking in the public realm. The project demonstrates significant impact in the local community and is a valued part of the creative ecosystem of the city.

Figure 4. Forest of Imagination Dens

This crisis engenders real change, it is a catalyst to hone thinking around new ways of working, now and post COVID, on how we extend meaningful digital and analogue engagement responding dynamically and collaboratively to best meet the challenges head-on. For example, in 2020 Forest of Imagination pivoted to a digital programme offering rich, interactive content, in partnership with House of Imagination, Grant Associates, the Big Green Draw and TED Countdown. Action research enquiry creates knowledge and change - respectful relationships between the creative and cultural industries have been vital in responding to challenges and enabling imaginative solutions.

### **City as Classroom: Creativity, values and a pedagogy of hope**

Rethinking waste AHRC project in Dharavi Mumbai where Compound 13 Lab is an experimental learning space, built on methodological and pedagogical innovation, where issues of work, waste, education and sustainability are explored to develop an ecological design curriculum for young people (Compound13.org). With a focus on the 'City as Classroom' and a 'Living Curriculum' underpinned by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the intention is to develop innovative, entrepreneurial solutions led by Dharavi's young people to the challenges that they face, and build creative skills to engage young people in imagining alternative futures to build their hopes and aspirations.

The Lab is a creative, shared space for experimental design, exploration and dialogue, drawing on the resources of the recycling industry, re-thinking plastic waste and creating a space for young people to explore issues of sustainability and ecological design. The intention is to develop innovative, entrepreneurial solutions led by Dharavi's young people

to the challenges that they face, and build creative skills, both in their lives now and for future employment.

The Lab explores and tests out a creative, inclusive and innovative pedagogy that is learner-centred and participatory, to engage young people and invite this sense of creative agency. This space of enquiry values local knowledges and practices that can be communicated within and beyond Dharavi, an approach underpinned by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Working alongside leading artists and designers in residence and Acorn Foundation, young people explore issues of waste, work, education, survival and sustainability in Dharavi. Music and the arts have intrinsic value in this process, allowing spaces of possibility but also inform ongoing community development. Young people are invited to make small acts of reclamation, given space, time and attention, and working with the haptic and sonic materials and tools that are to hand, experimenting with eco technologies - solar power, new processes, re-manufacturing, cultures of repair, adaptation and re-use. This 'maker culture' is open source, horizontal and shared.

At the heart of the approach in the Lab is the image of young people as creative and competent, valuing relationships and giving time, space and attention to supporting interdisciplinary learning in a collaborative context (Hay *et al* 2019:2). This approach informs how young people can develop an understanding of their lives now and be empowered to determine their own futures (ibid). At the Lab, young people are placed at the centre of their own learning, to co-design and develop a bespoke 'living curriculum' that responds to their issues, addresses their needs and aids their future goals (Compound 13.org). This emergent curriculum will provide some starting points for informal art and design education in India, acknowledging the lack of a visual arts curriculum, and particular design, in most formal primary and secondary schools. The future of the workplace will require a new generation of artists, designers and skilled makers. Giving children and young people agency in their learning is a powerful tool for change.

## **Conclusion**

Exploring new spaces of possibility is essential to facilitate personal and social transformation through the arts. As adults, we can embed a creative reflective pedagogy, to distil a 'repertoire of creative and artistic experiences that highlight an inclusive approach' to arts education (Hay *et al* 2019:2). Adults, children and young people are able

to witness and engage in an artistic, experimental site of learning, making visible their own creativity and creative learning.

A re-imagined education system can prioritise the creativity and freedom of each child in order to enable young people to truly flourish, to help children develop as whole, balanced, rounded human beings with the creative resilience to survive and thrive amidst this complexity. Now more than ever we need young people who have the imagination to envision a better future and the creative skills to bring it about. Art is an invitation to take risks, for encountering resistance and for making meaning in the world. So now is the time to reconceptualise education. New perspectives about teaching, research and practice in arts education are urgent, with a need to respond creatively in an uncertain future. We need to act with integrity, alongside children and young people, to ensure an authentic and creative experience of arts education for all.

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