

**Stand and Deliver: Your Targets or Your Life:
An Investigation into the Educational Culture and Practice
of the Creative Arts & Media Team in a Sixth Form College.**

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Abstract

Let's just admit it. The idea that we can take specific actions that result in measurable learning objectives is highly suspect. Teachers know that the cause and effect link between particular teaching action and identifiable student outcome is tenuous, at best probabilistic. At worst the insistence on this link is harmful¹. When particular actions are identified as having the causal effect of improving student outcomes our sector has rushed to scale up and we implement throughout a college or locality. Before we know it, before careful trial and educational evaluation, we have surveyed every learner in the country regarding their learning style, insisted on using 6 different thinking hats or accelerated everyone's learning. Before we know it we have wasted money and time but are no further on with understanding how to make things better. This case study will explore what happens when we move away from this objectives model to a process model where the teaching team are given time to focus on their own learning and the teaching & learning of the students in the College.

1. Introduction

A major finding of one of the main projects within the Teaching & Learning Research Programme (TLRP) was that the best way to improve learning is to develop the learning culture (James & Biesta, 2007). TLRP was the UK's largest ever educational research programme. It coordinated some 700 researchers in over 100 investments from 1999 to 2009. Biesta has since moved away from writing about *learning* to writing about *education*. He argues that 'when we talk about education we refer to a specific setting in which learning takes place; a setting, moreover, with a specific set of relationships, roles and responsibilities.' (Biesta, 2009, pp 3-4). This investigation is an investigation of a current education setting, the relationships and the roles & responsibilities. This study will consider the educational culture within the setting and ask: how can it be improved? A working definition of 'Educational Culture' for this paper is the symbols of power, control, decision making, trust, collaboration, care, competition, resistance and hope evident in the education setting. I am attempting here to study how educational improvement can be achieved through change, with a focus on improving the educational culture. Foucault has written:

¹ 'The TLC research shows that, in the context of shortage of resources, it often makes things worse' (James & Biesta, p. 150)

'Everyone has their own way of changing, or, what amounts to the same thing, of perceiving that everything changes. In this matter, nothing is more arrogant than trying to dictate to others. My way of no longer being the same is, by definition, the most unique part of what I am . Yet God knows there are ideological traffic police around, and we can hear their whistles blast: go left, go right, here, later, get moving, not now... (Foucault, 2000, p. 444)

This is a context specific piece of research. It is hoped that in learning about the educational culture of this particular Arts and Media team, in this particular Sixth Form College, more general lessons can be learnt. The motivation for the study is pragmatic, I hope that my experience of the research and my understandings of it will not only be of use in developing my practice and also be of interest and use to other College Principals, senior managers and practitioners in the sector.

Significant aspects of the context are:

-The Arts and Media Team have recently moved into their own newly refurbished accommodation. The accommodation was designed to allow more creative, flexible and expansive ways of working. There are large open plan spaces and very few conventional classrooms. The symbols of the classroom and the office are gone, replaced by more democratic open spaces. The team who had an input into the design of the refurbishment are consciously attempting to establish new ways of working in this new accommodation. I want to review the successes and failures of these new ways of working, asking how can further improvements be made?

-The feedback of students and staff, as well as student outcome data, contain very interesting contradictions with some overwhelmingly positive attitudes to the way that the Arts & Media Education is developing counterbalanced by fewer (but strong) dissenting voices. At this stage it seems that these contradictions may be very helpful in exploring how Arts & Media education can be further improved.

-The Arts and Media Team are experimenting with more flexible leadership and management structures as well as more flexible timetabling. They are attempting to free up staff to work more flexibly with their students, across courses and across disciplines. This creates a fluidity which some staff and students respond to very well

but also requires that staff and students step into leadership positions, taking responsibility. Inevitably this has been difficult for some staff and students because it involves a significant change in practice. I am mindful that It is important not to assume that because people are finding something difficult it means that it is not working or not worth doing. Indeed, the contrary may be true.

- In addition to this there is the broader context provided by the policies of the new Coalition Government and their priorities of fairness, freedom and responsibility. Increasingly College Leadership teams will be experiencing a shift from a culture of compliance to a culture of self determination, enterprise and innovation as the Government focuses on freeing up institutions and making them locally accountable. This means that Principals and other sector leaders are expected to make judgement calls, ethical and adaptive decisions in complex and uncertain situations, in the light of emerging evidence. This is a very different prospect from delivering the targets as set by the previous Government. In many ways it brings the moral imperative back into leadership. This study is partly a study of what happens if a Principal makes a decision to focus on education. How does that impact on the students, staff and the health of the organisation. The study is also relevant to all teaching and management staff in colleges and schools who may be able to make a similar decision.

A research colleague is also undertaking an anthropological study of the Arts and Media team, focussing on the relationship between the design of a built environment and the practices and culture that then unfold. Our interest lies in both the synergies that we find and, of course, the contradictions.

I will use evidence and findings from my colleague's research. At the end of the project there is an opportunity to draw some joint conclusions about what we have found.

2. Methodology

Phase 1: Desktop research

Phase one involved a review of hard data. In relation to students I looked at attendance, retention, achievement, value added and student feedback. In relation to staff I looked at staff turnover and the staff satisfaction surveys. All data

was reviewed pre and post the re-location, refurbishment and re-alignment of the sector.

In conceiving of this project I already had two very strong pieces of data. The first was that the Arts & Media Sector had been brought together, for the first time, into one building and that the building had undergone a significant refurbishment in accordance with the designs of the Sector Leader. The second was that the Sector Leader, working with his managers, had essentially ripped up the standard management chart for the sector and re-organised it along quite radical lines, asking people to step into fundamentally different cross-sector roles. Both of these initiatives had been driven by the Sector Leader and his team, they were not initiatives from the College Executive. Here is an example, perhaps the first in this College, of a shift in the location of power, control and decision making. A middle manager developed a vision and embarked upon implementing a series of actions that would enable that vision to be achieved. This included obtaining a new refurbished building which involved securing college finance and moving other college teams; it also included developing new, unusual and radically different models of curriculum, teaching & learning as well as management structures. Heifetz, Grashaw and Linsky refer to this as 'dancing on the edge of authority' (Heifetz, Grashaw, and Linsky, 2009, p. 25). These initiatives were driven, it was asserted, by ideas about how a creative curriculum should be constructed and creative teaching and learning should be undertaken. This was expressed by the Sector Leader as providing expansive spaces for expansive students, allowing staff and students to work across traditional subject boundaries. This included responding to flexible working patterns that are common with creative people and creative industries. At the time the concept of 'expansive' was not clearly defined but was informed by the idea that creative learners needed a space that their creativity could expand into. It was also quite literally a response to the fact that previously in cramped accommodation art students had been asked to keep their work to a small scale. During the course of this research project myself, and the team, have begun to use the term 'expansive learning at work' (Engelstrom, 2001). This term is useful to us because it helps to explain our endeavour to create a culture within the team which is focussed on learning. This includes having robust learning conversations and not accepting and implementing all the central commands of

the College management but making 'sideways' moves in order to ensure that all processes, for example, are fit for educational purposes. Fit for encouraging good education. As Biesta argues, in a pluralist society there will be a variety of opinions about what good education means. Indeed the very idea that there should be one standardised version of education is that it de-professionalizes our teachers and education professionals and can therefore be very damaging to education (Biesta, 2009). So, a useful definition of good education for the purposes of this paper is that good education encourages qualification, socialisation and individuation, such that students can achieve recognised qualification, can be socialised onto the world as citizens and perhaps as workers but also learn a way of existing that is more independent (Biesta, 2009, pp 7-8).

Phase 2: Engaging the team

In phase two the focus was on how to engage the team in a process of reflection, experimentation and further reflection. How could I engage the team in thinking about the current culture and practice and encourage them to make adjustments aimed at improving education. A process was designed that included a launch meeting with the whole team that summarised the literature on the relationship between the educational culture and performance (see literature review below), the meeting ended with an invite to the team to embark upon a project in which they formed a community of practice to review culture & practice and to commit to change & reflection.

A timetable was laid out including a minimum of 4 days off timetable plus other meeting time off timetable. The resourcing included the engagement of Professor John MacBeath (Professor of Leadership for Learning, Cambridge) and Joanne Waterhouse (Faculty of Education, Cambridge). MacBeath and Waterhouse were engaged due to their expertise in the relationship between leadership & learning. They would bring a focus on the importance of developing processes that focus on learning. They would also give the project some high status external facilitation to encourage reflection. This phase was about ensuring trust, in order that deep collaborative work could take place. The aim was to try and ensure that honest, robust conversations could happen in order that real improvements could be made.

Phase 3: A Community of Practice in Action

Phase three was defined by the formation and operation of the Community of Practice. This was made up of 26 staff, primarily from Creative Arts & Media. However, in order to ensure that the Creative Arts & Media team benefited from expertise elsewhere in the college and in order that other areas of the College could gain an understanding of the developments in Creative Arts & Media we also invited the Leader of Teaching & Learning, two Maths teachers and a Science teacher. The Community of Practice was officially given three days that would be attended by Prof. John MacBeath and Joanne Waterhouse, plus significant meeting time. The focus was for the community to reflect on current culture and practice and use the Community of Practice to jointly develop that culture and practice. During this phase, various resistances were encountered, including non-participation and part participation, that is attending but not wholly contributing. Through time and continued focus this was worked on, constantly acknowledging that different participants would have different motivations and backgrounds. Heifetz, Grashaw and Linksy remind us to listen to "the song beneath the words" (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 2009, p. 34). In other words, to remember that other people's motivations will not be the same as yours, indeed they may not even be the same as their stated motivations. In order to engage people properly with a change programme you need to try and understand what is in their background, what they care about, what losses they fear. It is only once these are understood that they can be addressed, accommodated and challenged if necessary.

Phase 4: Impact Assessment

In reality the review of progress and impact was not left to the end of the project but was a concurrent process. Especially as a part of the review of 'impact' was a review of the impact so far of the new accommodation and the new leadership & management approach. In addition to this there was also the review of the impact of the community of practice. Consequently review was a constant process involving hard and soft indicators of impact. Participants were asked to adopt the 'balcony' perspective (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002, p.53), in which they would simultaneously review their performance whilst performing. That is occupying the

'balcony' and 'dance floor' at the same time. The findings will be discussed in detail later and it will be shown that the new accommodation and new approach to leadership & management have had a significant impact on the culture and practice of the Arts & Media Team.

3. Link to Theory

There is a significant body of literature available that suggest that the way to create a healthy, successful and sustainable organisation is to create a culture that is focused on learning. This is clear in a range of disciplines from organisational theory & business literature, leadership and psychoanalytical literature and educational theory, it is also evident in Department for Education & Skills (DfES) and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned research.

Business Literature

Vineet Nayar's *Employees First, Customers Second* (Nayar, 2010) argues strongly that the way to improve performance in business and gain a competitive advantage is to focus on the employees. Nayar writes about the transformative process that he initiated at HCL Technologies arguing that *'when a company puts its employees first, the customer actually does ultimately come first and gains the greatest benefit, but in a far more transformative way than through traditional "customer care" programs'* (Nayar, 2010, p. 7).

Lynda Gratton working in the London Business School demonstrates that by creating employee 'Hot spots' an organisation allows its employees to 'Glow'. This leads to engaged, high performing employees and a successful organisation. Successful businesses are ones which foster Hot Spots which are *'a moment where people are working together in exceptionally creative and collaborative ways.'* (Gratton, 2007, p. 6). Gratton argues that the sensible business strategy is to create the conditions within which Hot Spots can develop.

This business practitioner (Nayar) and academic (Gratton) writing is supported by the findings of Government sponsored research. One example is the Macleod Review (Macleod, 2010) which was sponsored by BIS. The Macleod Review found

that there was a strong correlation between 'Engaged Employees' and performance. The review concluded that the results of organisations which were able to ensure that their employees were 'engaged' were more successful. Clearly, this supports the findings of Nayar and Gratton who both argue in different ways that the performance of an organisation can be radically improved if you focus on unlocking the potential of all employees.

Leadership Literature

Recent leadership literature supports the idea that the leadership task is to maximise the value staff bring to an organisation. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, working in the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, argue strongly that leadership needs to be generated throughout an organisation. This work echoes the ideas of Lynda Gratton encouraging executives to foster creativity and reflection:

'What is needed from a leadership perspective are new forms of improvisational expertise, a kind of process expertise that knows prudently how to experiment with never-been-tried-before relationships, means of communication, and ways of interacting that will help people develop solutions that build upon and surpass the wisdom of today's experts.' (Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009, pp. 2-3)

Gone is the leadership model where a wise leader commands and controls the staff in an organisation. This old model is too limiting and stifles ideas and creativity by preventing the formation of innovative hot spots.

Writing from a more clinical perspective Kets de Vries (2006) argued that leaders need to be authentic, open and honest. They should focus on creating organisations in which people have the confidence to generate ideas and solutions, organisations which are good places to work. Kets de Vries writes:

'Authentic leaders are cultural architects, creating a framework for the kind of values that make an organization a great place to work. They introduce a set of meta-values into their organizations – values that transcend the more traditional, generic listing of values found in most organizations.' (Kets de Vries, 2006 p. 377)

One way of understanding the framework that we are trying to establish in Creative Arts and Media is the framework of an 'expansive' environment (Engestrom, 2001). Engestrom explains how such environments allow for 'horizontal or sideways learning' (Engestrom, 2001, p. 153). Engestrom gives a detailed example of the construction of care agreements in a children's hospital. The management proposed an approach which was confronted by staff with hostility. From this came a new proposal that again was seen not to work, then finally another 'sideways' move was made and negotiated care agreements were implemented. In this case the individuals and organisation learnt together and co-created 'negotiated care agreements', which were a solution that what could work and was far better than the previous proposals. Through this process they agreed a better way of working. The development was not a top down process but involved a number of negotiations and sideways moves. This type of negotiation can be very tough and manifest itself as a confrontation, it is tempting to try and avoid confrontation at work, but not always wise.

Educational Theory

Recent Educational Theory and research into the Learning & Skills Sector also focuses on developing the culture of educational organisations such as Colleges. The Teaching & Learning Research Programme (TLRP), the biggest research programme in the UK into the Education system, has found that the most effective way to improve learning, for example in a college, is to improve the learning culture of that college. Thus, all members of that college: leadership; teachers; support staff; and students should be committed to learning. James and Biesta link this to models of leadership & management arguing that command and control management, characterised by the objectives model of setting targets and then achieving (or not) those targets, is not an effective way to improve learning. They argue that *'The dominant form of learning management at the moment is a version of the objectives model. The ... research show(s) that, in the context of shortage of resources, it often makes things worse.'* (James and Biesta, 2007, p. 150). So, they advocate a version of management that is process, not outcome focussed. There is a real resonance with the Business and Leadership Literature above which argues *against* central command and *for* establishing organisations

that allow staff to focus on innovation. For James and Biesta this would mean all staff and students focussing on the process of learning.

Professor Dylan Wiliam presents a particular mechanism for doing this, by creating Teacher Learning Communities, which he argues are the most effective way of Teachers Improving their practice (*Wiliam, 2007*). Teacher Learning Communities are a mechanism or process through which teachers can focus on their own learning about Teaching & Learning.

Michael Fielding's findings reinforce what Wiliam later said. In his research for the then named Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Fielding reports that the way for teachers to develop their practice and improve, is to create the mechanisms for joint practice development (Fielding, 2005). One mechanism for doing this is to set up Teacher Learning Communities. Fielding argues that other models of improvement are shallower, possibly harmful and are not centred on learning. '*A 'transfer' model seems to be associated with delivery of 'validated' packages of pre-formed practice seen by others to be good for the recipient. We suggest 'joint practice development' which explicitly articulates a more learner centred approach*' (Fielding, M. et. al, 2005, p. 72) . Thus Fielding can be seen arguing for focussing on the learning of teachers, encouraging a learning culture, in which teachers adopt a learning approach to improving teaching & learning in their school or college. Clearly this links back to the business and leadership literature reviewed above which argues similarly for an approach that encourages staff to develop their potential.

Professor Frank Coffield builds upon Fielding, Wiliam and James & Biesta, arguing that we need to take a cultural approach to learning, highlighting that learning is most often done with others. This is similar to Hot Spots or Teacher Learning Communities. He reinforces the fact that the focus should not be on disembodied targets such as retention or achievement but the aim should be '*for learners, tutors, managers, institutions, the sector and the education system itself to get better at T & L*' (*Coffield, 2008, p.17*).

Macbeath and Dempster specifically draw together the leadership and educational literature arguing that leadership and learning are inextricably linked. The first task of any leader is to focus on learning. They develop a process of 'Leadership for Learning' showing that a continued focus on that process will lead to improvements in learning. This is the task of an educational leader '*to build a culture of development.*' (Macbeath and Dempster, 2009, p.68).

Arts Education Literature

In the context of this particular project, the only remaining area of literature to consider is the area of Arts Education. Sir Ken Robinson argues strongly that our whole paradigm of education is based on an outmoded industrial model (Robinson, 2008). This is particularly damaging for creative, divergent thinkers and creative education. He states that the current system means that '*We are getting our children through education by anaesthetising them*' (Robinson, 2008). This is supported from a practitioner perspectives in *The Creative College* edited by Graham Jeffrey who argues that '*the task for teachers.....is to develop a microclimate where creativity might flourish....so that students and participants are enabled to access resources, exercise critical judgement, undertake experiments and construct novel ideas, collaborate to problem-solve and produce work that is of value to them and to the wider communities in which they are located.*' (Jeffrey, p. 6).

Conclusions from the Literature

I do not claim that the above review is complete. However, it can be seen that there is evidence that focussing on the learning of staff is a good way to improve performance. It is my assertion that this is particularly true in an educational setting such as a college. In a college many staff will be highly qualified, highly intelligent and committed professionals keen to help provide good education. They are likely to respond well to being encouraged to reflect, develop, learn and continue their own education. They will therefore act as models of lifelong learners to their students. Some leaders and managers in the post-16 education sector have forgotten the power of connecting core educational values to staff and

organisational performance. The way that staff are often treated as expendable is an example of this.

4. Findings

It is tempting to announce that the work of staff and students in the Creative Arts & Media Team work has been transformed and give examples to support this transformation. However, I have already cautioned against the spurious nature of cause and effect relationships in education. Instead, I can document here a number of changes in practice, provide comment on the educational culture that is developing, give examples of good education practice & outcomes and comment where progress is proving difficult.

What does it look like?

The Creative Arts & Media building is two storeys. Downstairs is almost completely open plan, with different areas for different mediums. The refurbishment of this part of the building essentially consisted of knocking down all the walls, painting the perimeter walls white and punching in some new windows. Upstairs is hi-tech, there are Macs everywhere. There are various studios and flexible spaces, a staff team room and an equipment stable where students can borrow equipment. The whole building has very good wireless connectivity. Downstairs feels very peaceful, upstairs buzzes. There are not really any classrooms in the traditional sense of the term.

This type of design has a symbolism and helps to create a particular kind of experience, or at least signals a particular type of experience. Classrooms have gone, so there are no sealed boxes, within which teachers 'deliver' knowledge to students. You might also argue there are fewer 'safe' and protected spaces. The space is freer and fluid and thus supports a freer atmosphere. The open plan nature of the accommodation lends itself to collaborative work. Students and teachers can be seen supporting each other, helping each other out, both in timetabled session and at other times. The lack of walls requires trust and openness and the lack of offices makes the building more democratic, with power exercised through open conversations in open spaces. Managers mingle with staff and everyone mingles with students.

There is also a symbolism across the rest of the college. The development is not always perceived as positive. Staff see the area as privileged and some resent the 'liberal' culture with the collapse of traditional lessons and therefore 'standards'. This was one of the reasons for inviting the mathematicians and scientists into the project, to work alongside Creative Arts & Media staff, in their accommodation.

The usual management structure has been ripped up. The majority of sectors of the College have quite conventional structures with a Sector Leader, usually three team leaders and then course leaders below. The structure that members of the Creative Arts & Media Team have developed is much more fluid and is not based on subject and course teams. Responsibilities are given to staff, not for courses but for themes such as Assessment for Learning; work related learning & partnerships; projects & innovation; and learner experience. The idea is that these thematics apply to all students across a range of courses.

The plan and the reality is that this more fluid building and this more fluid structure combine to enhance the Creative Arts & Media Education. They certainly encourage innovative ways of working that link more effectively with the community and where appropriate local businesses. This enables projects such as the *Carbon Diaries* to happen. In February 2010 BTEC Media, Fine Art and Art Foundation students worked collaboratively on a live brief for a Costa short-listed author. They produced work set in 2017 for the author's website based around their second novel. The work included students composing and performing a punk-inspired song called, 'The Carbon Age' which was accompanied by a music video. In addition they created a dating agency website called, 'Carbon Dating'. The students' work was exhibited at a formal book launch event held in London.

This project involved students from different courses and disciplines, working together to produce a variety of products in different media, they worked across the range of resources available to Arts & Media students, utilising the support of a variety of staff. Their work was assessed against the criteria for a variety of different vocational and academic courses. The project was for the author, an external client. It is unimaginable that this type of project would have been possible within the environs and culture of the Arts & Media team 3 years ago. The power and control of course

leaders with accountability and interest only on narrow courses, the physical separation of the disciplines and the lack of a decision making mechanism for the whole team would have proved to strong a resistance. Conversely, the current unified space, community of practice and fluid responsibilities ensures this kind of project can be sought out and delivered successfully.

i. Desk top

Student Data

Hard data is inevitably retrospective. Hard data is available for the year 2009-10, which is technically before this project started. However, it is after the refurbishment of the Arts & Media premises and after the new management structure was implemented. Nevertheless, it was before the establishment of the Communities of Practice.

Analysis of the data shows many positive things. The sector leader has commented that the students are 'getting into more competitive courses'. It is true that students are progressing onto high status Creative Arts and Media courses at University in larger numbers than before. In raw numbers progression to higher education from Creative Arts & Media students has risen from 57 in 2008, to 92 in 2010. This also includes greater representation on the courses that score higher in the University league tables. At the same time achievement of high grades is improving on all levels of courses, this is despite the fact that we are not increasing entry requirements or selecting. In 2009-10 high grades improved on level 3 one year courses from 37% to 42% and on all courses from 44% to 47%. Supporting this is some really strong value added performance; for example, the Media Production BTEC Award has Outstanding Value Added when measured against the ALPS benchmarks run by Alchemy Gold (<http://www.alps-va.co.uk/>).

Indeed the course is between the 90th and 99th centile in 2010 on this ALPS measure.

As a check to this good story above, overall Success Rates declined by 1% from 2009-10 in the Sector. However a 1% decline is not statistically significant.

Staff Data

Teacher Staff turnover is very low at 0% in 2009-10 and likely to be 0% in 2010-11. This compares with an overall College teacher staff turnover of 9.9% in 2009-10. In 2008-09 teacher staff turnover in Arts & Media was 13.6%, since the onset of this change programme staff turnover has dropped dramatically. To support this the staff survey ratings are very positive when compared with the rest of the college and, where possible, with national benchmarks provided by QDP.

QDP uses a rating system to quantify responses to the staff survey. Table 1 shows the rating against each theme from the Creative Arts & Media survey, it also show the difference from the rest of the College.

Havering Sixth Form College, QDP staff survey results 2010

Theme	Rating	+/- form rest of college
The College, Our Purpose, Structure and Direction	88	+6
Strategic Management	65	+12
Communications	51	+13
Organisation Values & Culture	75	+11
Cross College Organisation	65	+7
My Local Line Management	72	+5
My Colleagues in the Team	89	+10
Appraisal, Training and Development	66	+5
Career Development	48	+10
Equality and Diversity	65	+8
Health & Safety	71	+11
Job Security & Satisfaction	64	+17
Pay & Benefits	56	+17
Personal & Development Skills	87	+5
Self-Assessment & Planning	67	+3
Working Conditions	52	+3
Overall Satisfaction	80	+16

The rating provides a fair and honest reflection of the target groups perception, as it is based on accepting that 'Agree Mostly' is less than 'Agree Completely' (www.qdpservices.co.uk, accessed August 2011).

The evidence here is that the team are engaged by their work, which they find rewarding. They are considerably more satisfied than the rest of the College staff and are particularly positive in terms of satisfaction with their work.

However, despite the fact that the majority of staff seem to be overwhelmingly positive and full of hope about their engagement with work and the direction of travel in Creative Arts & Media there are some strong dissenting voices demonstrating significant resistance.

Oppositional comments from a very small minority included comments that things seemed to be *chaotic* with a lack of *coherent policy*. This was said to be *demotivating*, resulting in a withdrawal from engaging with the rest of the sector.

There are clearly contradictions in perceptions of power relays and systems of control and decision making in the Creative Arts & Media team, as highlighted in this data. However, it is interesting that this survey was taken in the first year of the changes and before the establishment of the community of practice. Working as a community of practice has allowed the team to address some difficult issues, for example clarity of vision, resource management and project design. This has taken a real commitment from the team, including the leadership to face and discuss critiques of the new developments. In this way, this very useful critique has been brought into the improvement process and provided challenge to the new dominant forms of power and control. Indeed, it is an example of expansive learning at work.

Engaging the Team

The team willingly engaged in the project. They spent at least three whole days operating off-timetable in 2010-11 as well as other meeting time. This included the whole Creative Arts & Media teaching team, some support staff and the Maths and Science teachers mentioned above. The staff were pleased to have time to reflect and plan. They were also keen to benefit from working with Prof. Macbeath and Joanne Waterhouse from the University of Cambridge. However, as the project evolved it became less clear how we could work with Prof. Macbeath and Waterhouse within the community of practice, as their position as outsiders presented some problems in terms of understanding and trust. The team preferred, in the end, to take a more democratic approach and sort out their issues with each other, themselves.

Community of Practice

The staff involved have formed a community of practice. An important element of this has been to ensure that community of practice can have difficult discussions. In setting up the Community of practice I did a presentation on the need for the

Community of practice to provide challenge without rancour. To support this we referred back to the College values:

1. **Learning through continuous development & reflection**- *capacity is developed and continuous learning is institutionalized*
2. **Responsibility** - *Responsibility for personal and organization's future is shared*
3. **Honesty** - *Elephants in the room are named and staff & students can speak truth to power*
4. **Independence** - *Independent judgement is expected and respected*
5. **Excellence** - *Achievement and Progression*

These values are hugely influenced by the work of Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky (2009), who lay out the values of an 'adaptive organisation', that is an organisation that can grow and adapt in these challenging times. The values are a way of supporting tough, painful discussion and the confrontation of reality, for example the comment in the staff survey. In addition to this I ran a workshop on leadership without authority, challenging staff to exercise leadership about what they felt passionate about, in order to improve things (Heifetz & and Linsky, 2009).

Through working together as a community of practice and with the initial aid of the external facilitation by Prof. John MacBeath and Joanne Waterhouse the team had many difficult discussions about what is currently working well and what is not. They have committed to work together on certain priorities listed below:

1. Clarity & Co-Creation of Vision – to include structure of team

It is agreed that a strong vision exists about educating creative students within an expansive environment that allows them to work creatively across boundaries producing high quality work. However the vision is not fully articulated, understood or agreed by all of the staff and students. A new vision will be developed through the community of practice. This will include discussing the awkward question of how this vision applies to students who are only in part motivated by the creative subjects e.g. those doing it as a fourth A Level.

II. Allocation of Structured Time

It is accepted that the community of practice needs time to operate. This must not be left to chance. Dylan Wiliam very clearly demonstrated that a community of practice needs structure in order to work. The team will discuss how they can arrange teaching & learning so they can have time to operate as a Community of Practice. This may involve articulating this to the rest of the college and the management as it may mean some time off timetable or re-organising of the timetable.

III. Taking Ownership of Systems to Tell Our Own Story

Current management processes such are often at best unwanted paper work (Self Assessment Report) and at worst, harmful (Achievement Review). Within the Community of Practice the team are going to reflect on how they can shape these college processes in order to improve learning. This will be a significant leadership task as it will require the design of new processes and the further development of relationships of trust and challenge plus convincing of college management that be-spoke processes are fit for purpose but responsive to unfolding evidence , with clear and agreed measures of accountability. This will be expansive learning at work in action.

IV. Project Planning

Important 'signature' projects need to be planned. Many staff have reported this year that the projects, eg. Induction, are not yet right. This shows that staff are able to speak truth to power. Currently the induction project attempts to induct students into the Arts & Media team and space by giving them a multi-disciplinary project that allows them to explore, art, media, photography, graphics etc. It is team taught and groups are mixed. In the light of the newly expressed vision the project needs more thorough planning in order that it does improve learning.

V. Skills Exchange/ Joint Practice Development

In order to properly support the work of the students and develop learning staff and students need to engage more frequently in exchange of skills. This will ensure that the full range of technology in the Arts & Media Team can be employed to best effect.

VI. *Resources & Accommodation Responsibility and Development*

Within the more fluid management structure a review is needed of how best to allocate, manage and improve resources. During one of the early meetings of the learning community it became apparent that there was confusion over this it was felt that this was having a detrimental impact on education.

VII. *Learner Voice*

Many students are highly engaged and motivated by their Arts & Media Education. However, some become confused and disengaged. The community of practice needs to consider how better to involve student in the design and review of their experiences.

Impact on the Education of Young People

Creative Arts & Media Students get higher grades and progress in higher numbers to good higher education courses. On the whole they are happy and engaged with their study. A research colleague has been having detailed discussions with students as part of her research project. Examples include a discussion with a female student who *'enjoys her lessons; enjoys the freedom to walk around and the fact that teachers do not pester but are always there if needed.'* In particular she likes the freedom to go about her own work in the good facilities. Reinforcing this a second Year textiles student who said she spent all of her free time in Arts & Media. She reported that she feels very involved in her work as the space makes her feel like a professional. One student was so positive that when asked how things could be improved she said *'Erm, I think maybe I'd prefer more lesson time for that one subject because it's my favourite one!'*

Recently I was invited to attend a test screening of some Creative Arts & Media student work. The group of students were in their first year of the Creative Arts & Media Diploma. They had taken it upon themselves to invite other students, senior managers, teachers, Borough employees and other partners. As I arrived in the Lecture Theatre the group of seven students nervously greeted me. They explained that they had won the commission to make a video to be used by the Council during National Apprenticeship Week. The group of seven students had formed a

production company and pitched their idea for the DVD to the Borough Council and won the opportunity to produce the seven minute film which highlighted the benefits of the Apprenticeships scheme on offer to learners. The purpose of this screening was to gain interim feedback on their work, which was due for completion in 4 days time. The students screened the film twice and then received the feedback professionally. They went on to make various adjustments to the film, which was then used extensively by the Council, their client. The students were clearly very proud of their achievement, in making this film. They shared with me that they had learnt so much in doing this, including team work, organisation, communication and technical expertise. They were completely committed to the idea of learning through working on these real, live projects. At least 20 similar projects have been undertaken in the last two years with a range of external clients.

As part of this research project I interviewed another team of students involved in the an Infants' school Project. In this project BTEC National Media students were commissioned to produce a promotional DVD that highlights the successes of the Teaching & Learning strategies employed at the Infants' School. Students made the film in consultation with the school and then screened it to 90 Year 1 students, school teachers and parents. The school are now using the video with prospective Year 1 parents to help explain their approach to Teaching & learning.

The team of 4 students were all upper 6th BTEC National Media students their pseudonyms are Anna, Simon, Rose and Megan. An interview with them revealed that engagement with the project had been a powerful learning experience. They valued working with 'high status' people such as the head teacher who treated them as professionals. Clearly the 'realness' of the project helped them to learn '..it shows in the industry just how organised you have to be' and 'it's quite a big deal...you don't really think about failure you think about the job in hand' (Megan). All of the group talked about teamwork and learning from criticism but also about the focus of getting something, of quality, finished 'we didn't ever think that we were going to fail' (Rose). The students were able to reflect on the way that the Arts & Media Team work and how that supported their project, 'we're quite happy with the flexibility that our teachers have given us' (Simon). Most important was the

ownership that the students felt for the project, the outcome and their learning. Anna commented that 'the project becomes your baby' and ' we can't let you know that we're unprofessional'.

5. Conclusion

The changes to the Educational Culture in the Creative Arts & Media Team at Havering Sixth Form College have been significant. Through the physical restructuring of the space and the re-casting of management responsibilities power has shifted from traditional locations such as team manager; course leader and teacher to more diverse locations. Power is situated and exerted within particular conversations regarding specific projects. Power has been decentralised. It is frequently situated with the students who are asserting more influence over their education, the design of their curriculum and the educative process that they go through. At the same time, power has been taken from the central college Executive and re-asserted elsewhere, at the level of the Creative Arts & Media Team themselves, who are creating their own ways of working.

The obvious *control* as symbolised by offices and classrooms; a strict timetable and clearly defined assignments planned by teachers has gone . Instead it has been replaced by a more democratic form of control, in that the open nature of the space and the work is self cleansing and self-policing. All is laid out for all to see. This is echoed by my research colleague who identified the main emerging themes as autonomy and empowerment. However, we both identified some tension; some students find the democracy disconcerting and it can lead to staff frustration when clarity is wanted. It also leads to responsibility, ownership and a commitment to improvement. There is a tension in the disequilibrium that can lead to resistance and frustration however this is outweighed by the increased creativity and innovation.

Dialogue about education is increasingly open and robust, decision making is increasingly *collaborative* and those involved in Creative Arts & Media Education at Havering Sixth Form College are strongly *hopeful* for the future. The collaboration in the team has created a way of working that ensures care of students and staff, such that people work together to overcome problems and meet educational challenges. In this sense the educational culture has been improved.

Implications for Leading and Managing a College

The process of undertaking research into a development within the College where I am the Principal has been fascinating. It has re-positioned me as a learner within the college. In doing this project I have attempted to occupy the 'dance floor' by influencing the developments in the Creative Arts & Media Team, this has been simultaneous with attempting to develop the 'balcony' perspective so that I can reflect on what is happening.

The balcony perspective is one that is easily occupied by the Principal or Chief Executive. The balcony perspective implies a privileged vantage point from which one looks at what is happening in the college below. But what happens when one occupies the balcony perspective with regard to one's own performance on the dance floor and the impact that performance has.

During the project particular challenges were thrown up to me as the Principal. These include: having to respond to a business plan that involved relocating large numbers of staff and resources into alternative accommodation; being challenged to consider the inappropriateness of my carefully designed organisational chart and having to accept the consequences of changing it for that area; being challenged to consider the inappropriateness of the college timetable for Arts & Media education; and being challenged to consider that some college processes were hindering and not helping education. These challenges were often a problem for *either/or* thinking in the college. There would be an assumption that *either* this structure is right *or* it isn't; *either* one type of timetable is right *or* another type is right. What was raised in this project was the fact that it is possible that many scenarios have different merits and the *either/or* dichotomy is not a suitable way of approaching these issues. So much of management thinking, including my own, is accustomed to making those *either/or* judgements and then standing by the judgment made, firmly, as if it were rock solid.

In this project I learnt, through the balcony and dance floor, that either/or thinking was often far too limiting as a way of making judgements about how to improve education. Much better to try and inhabit a more sophisticated arena in which the possibilities, benefits and drawbacks of different perspectives can be held in the mind, both privately and publicly. This can be helped in a powerful way by effective communities of practice. So it is possible, for example, in a community of practice to acknowledge the desire to create 'freedom' for creative students; acknowledge the need for security that students have; understand the excitement that staff feel about their new freedom; acknowledge staff fear of confusion; understand the desire to change the timetable; understand the negative impact on some aspects of the college of changing the timetable; celebrate the 'empowerment' of staff; acknowledge that the 'empowerment' can feel imprisoning; and understand that the Educational Culture is benefiting from these complexities being explored, not shut down. Most difficult for me has been understand that the fact that the Success Rate has not shot up, does not mean that the development has been a failure. Although what is more interesting is the question 'why hasn't the Success Rate gone up?'.

As Principals we are in a results driven business. We like things to be simple, coherent, consistent and with clear cause and effect links between actions and outputs. In doing this research I have learnt to hold the conflicting view points in my mind, understanding that exploring that conflict and creating communities that can explore that conflict; is the tough, interesting and rewarding work of leadership and of management. Managing this so that communities of practice can genuinely explore these multiple perspective, not close them down, is also a difficult thing to do. It requires time and the ability for leaders & managers in colleges to position themselves as learners, able to occupy balcony and dance floor and not rush to fixed perspectives. This is counter to the prevailing behaviours of many senior managers in the sector and I hope that my paper can contribute to that debate about what kind of leadership & management is required in order to improve education.

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