

# Creating culture:

## A tale of two schools

A Creative Learning Network Impact Report  
September 2023  
Dr Jane Booth

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# Creating Culture:

*A tale of two schools*

Dr Jane Booth

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Researched, compiled and edited by Dr Jane Booth

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With thanks and huge gratitude to all at Allan's Primary School, Stirling and  
Dounby Primary School, Orkney. The care and love shining from your  
communities is tangible and inspiring.

To Clare Hoare and Emma Gee – thank you for your trust.

For creatively brave souls everywhere.

“

*Great people make  
amazing things happen*

”



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## PROLOGUE

Presenting the outputs from a piece of research around creativity was never going to be a straightforward task! What should be included? How could it be presented? Who would the report be written for? How can the creativity that oozes out of every pore of the two schools involved in the research, best be reflected in the end piece of writing?

Allan's Primary School (Stirling) and Dounby Primary School (Orkney) are, without doubt, creative learning schools, and so it felt like this report needed to be creative in its' own right. Both schools are different and so this report, too, needed to be different, to offer something different, to look different. They are unique, special, inspirational schools and, at times, it felt almost impossible to capture the depth of their difference and creativity in a flat, 2D written report.

As the project progressed, it also felt hugely important that the voices of the people in both schools shone through. In the process of sharing their stories, it became clear that they were the people who needed to tell their stories – they are their stories to tell. The teachers, the pupils, the change agents who all contributed to creating and sustaining creative change.

And so this report is offered as a book. A book of four parts. Parts one and two offer tales from the Orkney and Stirling schools respectively, in the exact words of those who graciously and willingly shared their stories during this project. After deep consideration, it was felt that using the original words captured in research conversation, would be the most relevant, meaningful way to share these insights. Part three offers the research methodology, reflections and thematic analysis of the stories gathered in Part one. Finally, part four presents ideas and outputs created from the data (stories) that can be used going forward to support leaders, teachers and schools contemplating creative culture change.

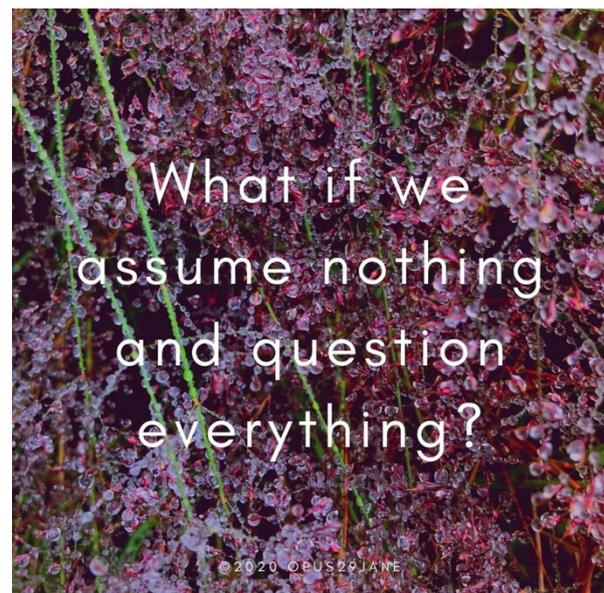
You are invited to dive into this book and see what emerges for you.

Maybe you have more questions?

Maybe you will discover some answers?

Maybe you will feel inspired?

Whatever you take from this book, you are encouraged to do one thing above all else...be creatively brave!



**PART ONE:**

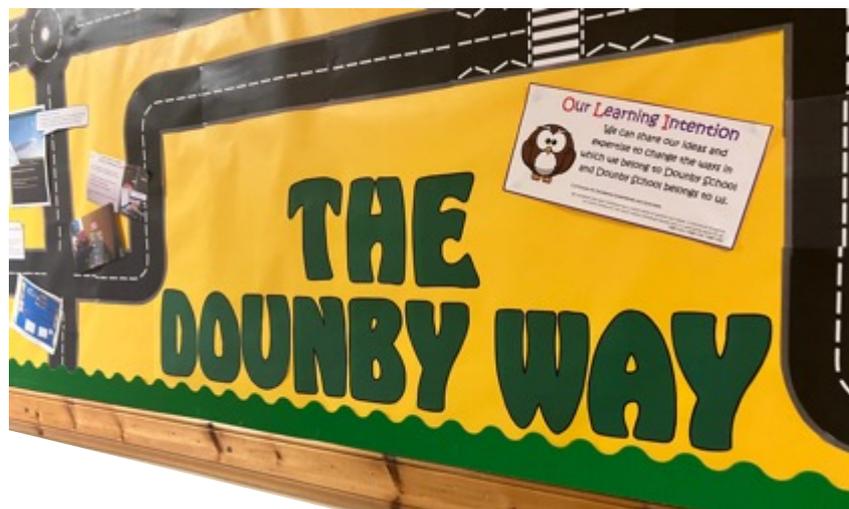
**DOUNBY PRIMARY SCHOOL,  
ORKNEY**

## PART ONE: DOUNBY PRIMARY SCHOOL, ORKNEY

This first part of the book presents the stories and of key personnel involved in the cultural shift at Dounby Primary School, Orkney. The interviews with Emma Gee (Arts Officer, Orkney Islands Council) and Islean Gibson (Head Teacher, Dounby Primary School) were recorded on zoom during the early part of the research process. The interview with the children at Dounby was recorded during a field visit to the school on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

The following transcripts tell the story of how Dounby Primary School has become a school achieving a National Practice Standard (and beyond) and was recently described by an inspector during an HMEI visit as a school...

“...creating a curriculum with no ceiling, where learners understand what the process of learning actually is by developing the metacognitive skills that will be their stronghold in learning, life and work”.



## **EMMA GEE, ARTS OFFICER, ORKNEY ISLANDS COUNCIL**

**Jane:** So tell me your story. That's what I want to hear. It doesn't have to be chronological, it doesn't have to be in order, it just has to be the story.

**Emma:** I probably will go chronologically because I'm that sort of a brain! My involvement in the story and how we got here starts when I came into the post of Art Officer in the Autumn of 2019. My predecessor had put into the hands of our Service Manager (Primary), Morag Miller, the responsibility for applying to the Creative Learning Network fund for a year's funding. From this, a couple of things resulted.

### ***In at the deep end***

One is that the creative learning network (CLN) were looking for a shift in focus for their investment away from just funding creatives coming into schools, which is why, for Orkney, it sat with an Arts Officer as opposed to within the education team. I think, anyway, because what used to happen was that there used to be a kind of call out from the Education Team to creatives to find out what their education offer was. The application to CLN would then be made with that in mind and then that funding would be made available to that school and the respective creative practitioner.

Now what the Creative Learning Network appeared to really be wanting to do, and as they were coming up to a kind of 10 year anniversary of trying to embed the creative curriculum, was to review how they worked and what they funded. They seemed to be looking at the models of projects that had actually been funded to date and were considering what had been generated and embedded. I think there was a feeling that a lot of them hadn't actually embedded anything concrete and that they needed more of a strategic function. At the time, I didn't know any of that to be honest. What I knew was that there was something written down on a handover thing that said the Hidden Giants were coming!

And in my induction, they went through who everybody was in all these offices, which you never remember anyway, but I remember one most particularly because they said, 'I need to talk to you about Creative Learning Network. The application is in we should hear in a couple of weeks'. I also distinctly remember, because it was an education person putting it in and because there was this shift in refocusing what applications needed to be, what she'd done was kind of 360 the new approach so that it was much more a strategic leadership, creative strategic leadership approach.

There's no great surprise, I suppose, because Service Managers are often more strategic and yet Morag had head teacher experience, so she came at it from that perspective and I think there was maybe a sense that if the funders won't support this, it won't happen. Yet it did happen and the thing they (CLN) were buying into was (initially it was for three schools, but in the end it was two schools) that they would pilot working for a year with the Hidden Giants team. The focus for Hidden Giants was to work with Dounby Primary and North Walls Primary to look at how they could use creative leadership thinking and creative learning right across the board in the school as a whole - not merely in arts education so that this notion of creative leadership was seen as horizontal and embraced as the type of leadership that comes from learners. In fact, everyone's a learner and this includes pupils, I'm going to use that term, pupils and staff throughout, which could be any member of staff. So the janitor at North Walls, for instance, is a very, very engaged member of the staff team creatively.

## **Hidden Giants**

So it wasn't about niching in any way, but it also had to include the traditional school leadership. If they didn't buy in, the rest of the staff weren't going to. To be honest, my first experience was turning up to the first day of a two day in-service training with those two schools representatives.

They all came along to see Paul and Matthew<sup>1</sup> doing the Paul and Matthew thing, which is really about creating a framework for thinking in an iconoclastic way. It's challenging everyday presumptions that are overt and asking why have we come to that? Why do we think that's the way? What are our givens and do they have to be givens?

During the course of that two days they used modelling as a tool. They spent the vast majority of the first day modelling the school as they currently were, and then the majority of the second day modelling them as staff would like it to be. Because they (Paul, Matthew and the two schools) had each other, they could use each other as audiences, so it was a very practical process in a way. Then each school had a follow on day where Hidden Giants went into that school specifically to see how the school functioned and to begin a conversation that was very much about what bespoke package each school needed. So one of the reasons Hidden Giants doesn't have a set process is that their process is to discover what is needed and it's a tough journey. There are times when you have your presumptions or assumptions questioned at a really fundamental level.

## **Brave leadership**

It takes quite brave leadership to undertake it and there were moments when we could see the head at North Walls at that time and the head of Dounby hitting walls, either at the same time or at different point for the same reasons...but they really did hit them! Then finding ways through was pretty tough. What was interesting for Dounby is that the principal teacher found that the challenge, the provocation just completely unlocked her practice and she started off with something in that autumn term. She went away at that half term and came back and did a whole different way of working that she's never come away from. When the Head at the time retired, this teacher became particularly anxious that her new approach wouldn't be retained by anybody new coming in...but actually the head that's come in is even more minded to work in that pupil led curriculum design way. So that's worked out very well.

What is interesting is both those two schools are still engaging and this is year four they are now going into. My ambition, I suppose, was and remains and is starting and happening, is that you grow schools that strategically know why and exactly what they want from engaging with a creative practitioner. So rather than just getting the creative doing a standalone 'thing', lovely though it is, you actually have a school that understands its own creative strategy well enough to know what they need to do next and who they might bring in. Then they bring that person or that practice in to further their creative learning strategy. Everything builds on everything else. It's not a standalone, it's not a peripheral, it's not just a nice thing at the end of the day or the end of a term or a sort of a fun day or a day that merely offered a one-off moment of fun.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Gorman, Matthew Sowerby; Hidden Giants, educational innovators/creative practitioners – external change agents

It's not a Red Nose Day thing. It's embedded and you've actually got the knowledge and the understanding of what you're trying to achieve through having creative learning strategically embedded in your school. That's certainly what started happening for those two schools. We weren't able to get funding in the following year because there was a freeze on the Creative Learning Network funding in that lockdown year. So they didn't fund it, but I managed to get funding from our education department and so we ran the project with Matthew<sup>2</sup> with two additional schools, both larger primary's.

### ***Right people; right place***

At this time the work all obviously had to be online as there couldn't be any physical engagement. It did not take in quite the same way as it had the first time round. This is particularly interesting, mainly because there is a setup with a head that desperately wants to change the culture of their organisation, but they simply weren't able to make the desired shift because there are staff that simply could not engage or change. So it was an interesting exercise in discovery and not just because Matthew<sup>2</sup> was working under his own name, as for all intents and purposes it was a Hidden Giants approach. It used all the same approaches as the first year and the same associates and all of that and, it is also bespoke so matched to the need of the school. It was very interesting to discover that it kind of effectively didn't matter, because the person who would need to drive it through did not have the power to drive it through.

In the case of the other school, it was a very different thing because actually you had a head there that was really very questioning. Very much questioning of their own role and this became an opportunity for them to look at that. So I think in that iteration, it was very useful for the school and it was useful for us to learn a lot of things. What we learned, however, was not necessarily a successful or desired Creative Learning Network outcome! We tried some work with one of the cluster schools. So that's where we've got two sets of cluster schools where you have two small schools and a satellite school that have got one single head. I mean, that head changed part the way through which is another interesting point. I don't know if this is mirrored in mainland Scotland, but here we have a seemingly rapid changeover of heads and that is staggering to me. Absolutely staggering. So at least five of the schools we worked with no longer have the same head as when we started. Wow!

**Jane:** Out of curiosity, are all those heads people who've come onto the island for those roles or have they moved within schools within the island?

**Emma:** Both. There's a combination of both actually. For example, one was a deputy, then acting Head at one school, then came to a Headship at another. The thing is, what seems to happen is they become part of the council team delivering education services. This is partly why I say it's been particularly pleasing that two of the pilot schools are still working in their creative way even though they've had headship changes. Also we have heads we have worked with who've come into the education service team and they have said they found working with Matthew<sup>2</sup> really helpful, even though it didn't actually result in them being able to embed a creative learning culture within the school.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Sowerby; Hidden Giants, educational innovators/creative practitioners – external change agent

## ***Leading a revolution; sharing learning***

For this year's application, I mean quite apart from the fact that Paul and Matthew weren't available anyway, we had to change the pattern because simply rolling out Hidden Giants to another two schools didn't feel appropriate. We'd already kind of tested this and moved on. We felt that this would really only work if you went back to the original model with an in-depth, in-person kick off with the schools then taking it on with a leadership that is able to drive it through. So what we thought we could do is go back to where it's working well and actually harness them in a revolutionary kind of way.

We knew that Islean at Dounby, was already doing kind of mentorship and is setting up all sorts CPLD stuff and is very proactive in the larger school heads meetings and things like that. We thought we could build on that and that's how we got to here working with Dounby and Allan's in Stirling. Both are very active creative learning, pupil led, curriculum focused schools working on a trajectory to make that run as an ethos throughout, but they have used different creative learning models and a design approach and worked it in equally successful embedded ways. Through this twinning, then, they can support each other and do sharing, then mentoring where they can both work with a school on their own patch that is already indicating they would like to work in these creative directions. Yet there is uncertainty in both Dounby and Allan's about what actually worked really well and how they could cascade this to another school, which is where this research and reflection process comes in.

It's about helping us and them understand what has worked, and why, and perhaps what the foundations for success are when looking to embed a creative learning philosophy in your school. Then in terms of the mentoring idea, I suspect there is something about a peer educator in your patch saying 'it's not as scary as you think it's, it's achievable actually'. 'Not only is it achievable, but it'll hit your target attainment results'. Not tomorrow necessarily, but it does make it more viable than bringing in an externally funded facilitator. Yeah. So maybe, I mean it's just trying another way and trying just to keep moving things forward.

**Jane:** You talked about it being a tough journey for schools and that there are times when you will have your fundamentals questioned and that it takes brave leadership to keep going. How would you define or describe what brave leadership looks like for you? How would you know when you see it in the context of this creative learning work?

**Emma:** What was very interesting to me in the early days is that the Corporate Director of our Service had come through education and was one of the heads of education who had a number of schools across Orkney to support. When I was in those schools I was constantly hearing teachers wondering what their Head of Service would say about something they wanted to implement, and sometimes their belief about what they would think might stop them doing it. There was almost a fear about it.

For example, when I invited the head at North Walls, to be part of a conversation about creative leadership at the online creative learning network, they had an anxiety about presenting anything because they felt they were nowhere near close to having completed or finished. They were still very embryonic, still exploring, and it wasn't a complete package. They were therefore worried about what their Head of Service would say about anything it could be perceived to show us and them in a bad light? So I had to say, 'no, this is a platform for exploring where your practice has got to, identifying where the snags have been to this point, talking about any cul-de-sacs where you had to back down a track and wouldn't go that way again. It's about things not being completed. It's about creative learning, which is never completed'.

## **Being brave**

For me then, I would tell you that it was a huge act of bravery for her to take the plunge and make the decision that it was safe to talk at that national level without going and asking formally for permission to do that. I also thought there is something wrong if the local authority guidance or management would suppress that. Now I know, however, that the now head of education, has absolutely nothing but immense support for this approach and this way of working, so it wouldn't have been problematic had we gone to the current Head of Education and said, 'is this going to be okay?'

We didn't know this at the time though and at that moment, the Head of North Walls was uncertain of how their work was viewed by the Head of Service and Education, so I would say there was a huge act of bravery in just speaking in public. I worked with them, I did a whole session on their ability to speak, to help them using acting exercises because they were so impassioned about their work. As soon as they started talking they would actually start to cry so we needed, to try to get them to just be able to perform as themselves I suppose - really practical stuff. It was definitely an act of bravery to be there and speak, and they absolutely blew it away when they spoke because they were able to 'be' as themselves and express their passion and care and enthusiasm for what they were doing. I was actually really surprised at how this thing then flew as people were captivated by their manner.

The other act of bravery for them was that the very next day, they shared part of a film that was entirely pupil lead and about their school. They were brave in many ways, including letting the pupils have a slot in the creative learning network session which they entirely managed. They were also brave to stand back and allow them to lead. In the sessions the pupils showed about two minutes worth of the film. It wasn't completed, it was still unedited, it was all over the place, but it showed two minutes of good moments and the pupils then also completely ran the Q and A. The Head was in the background so they were not completely alone and we could have picked anything up, yet we did not need to.

Prior to the session, the school had gone through a democratic process where all children had voted for the five children who would be the representatives. It was the kids film, the kids had chosen who would be their spokespeople, with the conversation happening entirely between the audience and them. I think that was an act of bravery and subsequently I have seen Islean at Dounby do the same.

I also think it was an act of bravery with the outgoing head at Dounby. I think for them, they knew something really needed to change and that they were perhaps not the person to lead that change. Somebody towards the end of their working life could have chosen to simply coast their way down to pension, but they knew there was something very fundamental that needed to shift that wasn't working, wasn't right and needed shifting. I think it was an immense act of bravery to go, 'I think this is it and it's going to shake things up'. I honestly think that the process with Hidden Giants enabled them to take stock and realise they weren't comfortable with what needed to happen, but there were other people, other staff in place who had the skillset to take it forward. I could almost see them going, 'oh, I don't need to have control over all of this, other people can lead'. For me, that relinquishing of control was a massive act of bravery early on. I equally think it was a massive act of bravery of the principal teacher that they were so dedicated to the value of that ethos that they were doing her level best to speak, to lobby, even though they are a very quiet, very unassuming, quite shy, proper Orcadian person, but they advocated and lobbied for that kind of work not to be lost with the new head. Brilliant.

**Jane:** So let me run these phrases past you, phrases I've jotted down as you're speaking. So brave leadership is speaking up and speaking out about what you're passionate about, even when this goes against the grain or the status quo. Brave leadership is making changes when the status quo of current practice and management systems are actually in your way. Brave leadership is deciding it's okay to do things even when you are not sure you have 'permission'.

Brave leadership is acting in line with your beliefs. It's sharing vulnerability, it's being open, it's sharing the messiness of learning. It's sharing the unfinished process, trusting young people and others to do and share their learning, doing things in an unexpected way. It's not reinforcing the norm or acting in a way that's expected. It is taking measured creative risks, choosing the bumpy road towards change and difference, moving away from comfort and status quo and safety, relinquishing control, distributed leadership. That kind of thing?

And this brave leadership is when you're dedicated to the value and ethos, in this case of creative learning, and you are maybe not the traditionally identified 'leader' but you feel driven to passionately advocate for and take action to drive change. I kind of feel like brave leadership is not leaders as in the people at the top, it could be leaders wherever in the system, and this is what it takes to lead this type of process.

**Emma:** Kind of that idea of horizontality. I suppose that being brave...that thing about bravery, is to find your leadership at every level. I mean the work here is not just creative learning, it is pupil led curriculum design and that takes bravery around trusting that as a teacher or whatever leader, you have an effective toolbox and skillset to operate with impact, but also in the knowledge that you don't have to have the outcome sorted.

**Jane:** So bravery is starting a process and not knowing the outcome?

### ***Trust yourself***

**Emma:** Yeah, because I think it's true in the arts too. I mean, artists put themselves in places of not knowing quite deliberately because they then trust in themselves to come up with an appropriate response. Knowing that whatever they come up with, they've created it out of uncertainty. And I think teachers have the same thing, but they have a pressure, a responsibility, a statutory responsibility to drill certain things into their pupils. As a result, they think they've got to know the outcome.

The thing is, though, when you don't know the outcome or which set of tools you'll use, you start to open it up with pupils and let them lead you. You just have to believe that there'll be the right tool in the bag, but it takes a lot of trust and skill. The previous Head at North Walls was particularly vocal at the Creative Learning Network annual event about saying that we are not training teachers with that skillset. They were meeting people that were brilliant teachers when they knew the outcome, but if they came off the train track, it all came to a shuddering halt

It's like we are training teachers to train pupils to pass assessments, pass exams. Giving them fish but not teaching them how to use their own rod. There's a couple of real tensions here, isn't there? There's one in which there's a recognition from employers that they really don't need somebody who knows how to do quadratic triangles and know all the kings and queens, that knowledge thing. What they need is that creative toolkit of problem solvers, innovators, critical thinkers.

Nosey people who trust their gut and then work out why it didn't work so they can fail better next time. People who are excited to learn and be curious. Anybody that's kind of getting worked up about creativity, having a panic, doesn't really know what it is. As soon as you start to talking about creativity, people say 'I'm not all creative, I can't draw'. Then you have to explain you don't mean drawing, you mean problem solving, thinking differently and so on.

### ***Trust your learners***

So that is the set of skills we need going into the future. You need creative people because you'll only have resilience if you can cope with the uncertainty. All of those things that we've been through, all of those phrases and whatever. However, the reality is we are ruled by people who are absolutely terrified that the population gain that set of skills. If they do, they will critically think through what is currently going on, and they already are. If you think that children don't understand that it's wrong that they can't have food and people are homeless, you are wrong! There's nothing, nobody more dialled into unfairness than a five-year-old, especially when it's them on the end of the unfairness. Or a friend or their grandma.

**Jane:** "They've got more sweets than me!"

**Emma:** Exactly. But they're dialled in and totally get it!

Dounby have been doing a lot of creative projects, but in particular the work that Dounby have just been doing in partnership with the National Gallery of Scotland on your art world tool is impressive. It's a free tool for any educators to get into a kind of pupil led approach to art. So instead of having this 'right, today, we're all going to draw this apple or can you copy this scene?' Or 'we've all going to make this Halloween cat and here's the template and now you fill it in'. This is about provocations. There's word provocations, there's visual provocations, there's all sorts of provocations that get something going. Ideally what the National Galleries want in the design of the subsequent work is from a word or provocation actually provided by the young people themselves.

This year there will be a return to the children's exhibition in the new galleries that are opening in the summer. So what they've done is picked about ten schools around Scotland to work in a bit more of a concentrated way with an artist to produce an extended display. Also, any child and any school can submit any artwork for the exhibition and what doesn't get put on the walls physically, every single submission will go on the digital gallery and they'll put as much in as they receive. It's called 'Your Art World'. In Dounby, the artist they chose to work with was called Martin Laird and he was interviewed and chosen by the kids! The children did all the recruitment and chose who they most wanted to work with.

Martin has ended up working really closely with the itinerant art teacher in the school, because in Orkney we still have artists with an art teaching specialism that go around the schools. It's brilliant. Their installation is a character called 'Trashy' who's made of trash. If you talk to the kids about understanding justice and environmental issues, Trashy and the project has all been about that. The word that they came up with, that was entirely theirs, was 'protect'.

So everything has come from this word, protect the world, protect Trashy, Trashy protects you. Every child in the school has produced this kind of shoebox piece of artwork representing their ideas. Some have put inside them the things they want to protect. Some have got things actually on the outside, but everybody's is unique. These boxes then act as a kind of protective wall around Trashy, then in front of Trashy, there are floor cushions that have been decorated with images for people to sit with Trashy and be protected and protect him. It is lovely! There's also some film projection and some sound work that is incorporated in all of that. So yeah, all wonderful.

### ***Go with the flow – let stuff happen***

And what came out of the follow up work with Matthew<sup>3</sup> prior to Trashy was Bob, a little kind of robot thing – a 3D character. You see, what Islean and the team thought about doing once the staff had done a re-modelling of Dounby following the work with Matthew, was to do another re-modelling exercise with the children. They liked that modelling exercise so much that I think four or five, it wasn't very many, four or five of the pupils were pulled together to see how it worked with kids. What was really interesting is they came up with a character that was 3D - Bob.

So rather than a kind of 2D mapping thing with lots of metaphor, this was a 3D character with lots of metaphors. He's a little robot thing with little squiggly, those squiggly things that you hold in your hands, the fidgety things that kind of all wiggle round. And there are little spirally things, one for his brain and then inside two upside down cups are all sorts of different things because Dounby is made up of all sorts of people. And he's got a great big thumbs up because they're all very happy to be at school.

So he's a sort of mascot and at one point the kids decided that they wanted Trashy to hold Bob to protect him. Then what has happened in a conversation between the National Galleries and Islean, was that maybe Bob could do a bit of a journey down to Edinburgh via all sorts of other places so that he can arrive to be put into Trashy's hand. So Bob now has a suitcase and camera and is off on his travels! He's going to Stirling and I don't know which school he'd be popping into it. It almost certainly will be a creative school and he will do all sorts of things.

Bob is going on a bit of a journey which will be kind of documented and what is really brilliant is that the school took this on and went with the flow. This was originally only four or five kids that created a Bob, then from the presentation in January to Creative Learning Network, it came about that it was all about 'be more Bob'. So this is Bob, this is how Bob came about, and then they wanted to give the opportunity to all the kids to make a Bob, then work together to create a large scale Bob, which then led to Trashy.

Going back to your original question then, in terms of where 'here' is, here is having a big installation in the Scottish National Gallery! What has led up to here, though, involves a whole host of activities, random connections, leadership and bravery. What's next is about building on this and seeing where it can evolve to. What we are proposing in our expression of interest is that, using Your Art World as the tool, we can build a deeper approach to creative learning.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Sowerby; Hidden Giants, educational innovators/creative practitioners – external change agent

### ***Building foundations; moving on***

What I've been saying is that something like this doesn't really need to scare the horses! For those people that are deeply sceptical of doing creative things because they see it as 'arty', Your Art World doesn't intrude too much, but it introduces an approach in a quite safe way and yet people who want to, can go completely bonkers with it. Just like Dounby and my end of the spectrum! So you've got that tool that I think can work at either end of the spectrum. Then building on the twinning and mentoring project, what we're wondering is do we focus future funding on the two schools that are being mentored? One in Stirling, one in Orkney still with a little bit of engagement with their mentor partner, but actually it's their next step. They are supported with mentoring and then they get to be able to practice a bit deeper and build their creative learning approach, whatever that looks like.

And another thing, it feels like a creative learning culture sparks other ideas and sparks opportunities and creates opportunities. It opens doors to things that you might not have seen before and might not have been possible and creates connections just because people are thinking more freely and not being constrained by the status quo or the unspoken rules or the spoken rules sometimes. So actually to be able to say to a school, here's some support on the theory or the strategy side of things and now here's a project to practice on, then see where it takes you. You'll still have some support but go, do your thing.

I suppose that was what the little film that North Walls did and obviously the creation of Bob and 'Your Art World' has helped Dounby extend and build their culture. Then this year's Creative Learning Network project, in addition to what Dounby and Allan's will be doing, North Walls are back in the picture because there's a little bit of money for them. The current Head wanted to do a kind of photography project he had in mind around portraiture of people from Hoy who'd been through the school and what they were now doing in life. Like this person is now a lighthouse keeper, this person now is on the lifeboat, this person farms, that sort of thing. That idea of connection and the artist that had worked on the film interestingly enough produced a series of portraiture kind of called Orkney stories that was exhibited last November.

It was exactly that around people, creatives in the Orkney community that are kind of a bit unsung and never really put themselves forward to be seen. That was my second meeting today, bringing the Head at North Walls and Martin together to share Martin's experience of working in the pupil led way on the film with Dounby. The children involved in the portraiture project will then be those that will take the portraits but they'll also be involved in who in the community needs to be recognised and they will be responsible for getting in touch with them and asking if they would be able would do it. Then the other idea is that we take their portraiture in their context so we have to go out to them that'd be by the boat and by their farm, by tractor.

**Jane:** As you're talking, I'm wondering, what are the ways in which we show the shifts. Almost like from...to, so just from what you've talked, it's almost like before embracing a creative approach, before some of this work, schools had an inward looking approach, yet it now goes to an outward looking approach. It's finding and it's asking, 'what are the things that we could use to show those shifts? What does an inward or an outward approach mean? What does it mean to be connected, to be looking beyond the walls of your building?' to be that sort of. I don't know yet, but that's in my mind as I listen and wonder.

## *Creating impact – looking beyond the activity*

**Emma:** Think that's true for me, with the emphasis being on more, and of course I wasn't around prior, but it's more that it's the school determining how creative practitioners can come and help them with strategic change through creative practice in their schools rather than just getting someone in to do printing work or painting or making. Yes, it's lovely for somebody to come and do some printing work and on that day those kids get benefit from it, but where is the ongoing impact?

The other deeply important thing to say in terms of North Walls has been their engagement as junior curators for the new Scapa Flow Museum, which started prior to being called Junior Curators, which is a national Gallery Scotland thing. We had a responsibility to National Heritage Lottery for engagement, but for a while nothing happened. There was such a hiatus due to getting a contractor and then COVID, that there was quite a gap and a beginning of some negative feeling from the community that actually the reality was they weren't going to get their museum back.

I thought one way to win the hearts and minds back of the local community is through the kids, and we've got a school here that is unbelievably keen to engage with all manner of creativity. So the first thing I said was, 'well in that case I want the kids on the building site, hard hats and protective gear and everything, so they could be the consultants for the education space.' They needed to be there, actually impacting on what that education space would look like, not just the tokenistic consultee. I can tell you that at the project meeting you could see panic in the eyes of the 'grown ups'! I think there was a fear that they'd all come back and they'd be saying, 'well we'll have some Disney princesses and we will end up doing it anyway'. And I said, 'trust me and trust them. They are really switched on. It's not that we will ask questions that mean there is only one right answer, but this will be done well'.

And it was a huge success. They brought with them the mood board they'd worked on at school before they came down, I'd done some preliminary work with them so they knew what to expect with the site and I described what the architect was going to use and so on. It was World War II and camouflage for boats and ships was done in these zigzags called dazzle because it broke up the shape of the boat so that from a distance you not see that it was boat shape. You were kind of like going, what is that? What is that? There's not camouflage as in plants that would stand out and you go, there's some trees over. It's just messing with your mind and breaking up what it's like an optical illusion almost.

What the architect was going to do was paint one wall in dazzle and then in the larger of the exhibition spaces, a wall that was largely going to be a blank space, a blank canvas. The school, the kids had said, when I went and did some pre-work with them, they said they didn't want it to be boring this space. When I asked what would make it not boring, they said colour. Then they also said, this is a space for us to be calm and we need to put our bags somewhere and then we need to be able to sit on things and stuff like that. They have all these ideas. In fact they even found some seating, that when it was all stacked up looked like a kind of mine - it was hilarious. But the idea that it was seating that could kind of move and be modular whatever and colour and all of that sort of stuff.

They also discovered that dazzle paint, even though when you look at a lot of the photography is black and white, was not black and white. They found some colour photographs. They found two or three colour photographs and one of the yellow submarine at Liverpool, in very colourful dazzle. So they were able to make a case, a really well-researched, well-informed case.

What was brilliant was, we are there on site with the contractor, the head of the contracting firm and the visitor service officer and there's all this panic! They don't know what the kids will do or ask and you can almost see them thinking, 'well, what on earth is this going to look like?' And I said, you are coming here as an expert in the museum and they're coming as experts in being what age they are. So it was a meeting of experts and it was really successful. And it has been designed as they requested.

### ***Teacher led to pupil trusted***

**Jane:** As you are talking, I'm thinking one of the things I feel like I am hearing is that actually we are not talking about going from a teacher led to pupil led classroom. It's actually almost more like teacher led to pupil trusted. It almost feels really easy to go, 'well we want to be pupil centred and at the moment we're teacher centred, so that's what we need to shift'. However, it's maybe not sort of that simple because at times a classroom still needs to be teacher led on some tasks. So maybe growing the pupil trust, or rather growing the trust that teachers have in their pupils, is a key to shifting a learning culture?

**Emma:** The thing is, it's often organised chaos. It's organised risk taking. And it's not that it doesn't have a framework, it's not about anything goes. I mean if anything went, we could have lost a child down a hole on the building site. Rather it's about prepping the parameters and then within those parameters, where is the space? So the parameters on the building site were about safety and whatever, but it was also that they had a responsibility to be their age and to be experts in that and say, I don't understand that. For example, we found ourselves looking at the cesspit hole in front of the Museum! I mean, obviously we spent hours talking about that. We also spent a long time looking at the design and framework, because why wouldn't you?

And what we found was that it was very badly designed and they had all sat around with the contractor saying 'this won't work, people will fall down, that won't work'. Then the pupils looked at what they needed it to do from their perspective and kind of figured it out. I trusted them and they delivered. Really interesting!



## ISLEAN GIBSON, HEAD TEACHER, DOUNBY PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Jane:** What I am really interested in is your experience and your story. Ultimately, I guess, this is about the pupils, their voice, their experience, how they embrace this and what they learn. For now, though, what I'm curious about is what have you done, what have you noticed or what have you started at the school. So, tell me your story from arriving at this school and to now. It doesn't need to be in order or structured, just tell me things that feel important.

### *Getting messy*

**Islean:** I suppose it's all kind of messy is probably the best way to start, but I think anything that is going to be productive will be messy to begin with and it'll sort itself out in whichever direction it wants to take itself. Before I had arrived, the school had been engaging with Hidden Giants. So Matthew and Paul<sup>4</sup> had been trying to do a lot of work, not just with our school but other schools on the islands council. They'd been at a couple of events and the guys had been out at school trying to get folks to realise that education is not rigid, I think is probably a fair assessment, but nobody really took it on. I remember them describing a previous experience, they did a creative visualisation of what school is to you, and someone ended up marching around like a dinosaur around the sort of outside of the building, like a protector type thing.

So I think they really struggled from the get go to see that actually everything is more and it's not confined to what we traditionally know as a school. So when I arrived I'd already worked with Paul Gorman at Perth, oh gosh, about six or seven years ago now. And I remember it was kind of what started opening my eyes to children, really just owning what they learn because for me personally, it's more important that they understand the process of learning than the content of what it is that they learn. Because if you've got a learning cycle or a visible way of doing something or a practical approach that suits you are going to learn whatever it is you need to learn within that. So it's almost like throwing the curriculum out to put learning and teaching first and then figure out all the other bits that go alongside it. I can probably see why a local authority maybe didn't quite like that approach from the get go because curriculum is important! Yet for me it is not as important as knowing how to learn and being able to follow your interests.

Trying to prepare kids for university is not the easiest of things in this day and age. It is hard – they have to get their grades. There used to also be a route into apprenticeships, you needed that kind of option, whereas it's not now because we need kids to get ready for University and figure out what the future might look like for everybody. So when I arrived, my principal teacher was so keen, she just wanted to be let loose, I think is probably a good way to describe it. So we did, we didn't really do anything for the first couple of months or so. It was just really me getting used to a new school and everything else and they needed a lot of work done.

There hadn't been a lot of development since pre-COVID, and probably a substantial time before then. Actually everybody was kind of just scrambling around doing what they always did. I've always done this at this stage, so I'm always going to do this, the set curriculum, these topics, these things. You could see just walking in the classroom, there are the usual kids that you can spot who are going to be excited by anything you put in front of them. Then you've got the kids who are already knowledgeable so that yes, they're interested but they're also disengaged at the same time. They kind of already know that. And then you've got the kids for whom reading stuff about a theme that is never going to get them really excited about what they're learning until it becomes something that's way off topic and appeals to their interests.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Gorman, Matthew Sowerby; Hidden Giants, educational innovators/creative practitioners – external change agents

### ***Cutting loose***

So Rachel, my Principal Teacher, and I did a lot of work in trying to get teachers away from such rigorous structure. I mean they had planning folders that were two reams thick and I was like, what do you actually use any of this for? Having been a teaching head in my previous post, then a shared head, I had always had a teaching commitment so you were always working and I was like, I never use half these papers as a class teacher, never mind as a teaching head! I wanted to see what others were planning, so we sat down, we had a collegiate meeting and basically said, what do you, what don't you like? Everybody was like, 'so much paperwork and so much bureaucracy', all the things that they're holding onto for dear life, for security.

So we just took it all away. Fundamentally that's what we did. We took it all away and we said, okay, we're going to look at a core curriculum of literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing. They're the responsibilities of all and for everything else, we're just going to take a step back. We're not going to worry if we've covered or not covered tiny bits of Es and Os in the curriculum. We are just going to look at things that children are interested in learning and get the engagement back up and it kind of just spiralled from there. So I think this is about 18 months in. Everybody's done well. We've had different staff, we're all part-time staff apart from one, so everybody's all done different bits, but we calculated the other day, we reckon everybody's now done at least four contexts where they start off by saying, what is it you want to learn?

Whenever we ask that question, we get a class debate of 'I want to do the Vikings' and somebody else is determined to study football and somebody else something else. So they iron it all out, work it out together and they're doing it in very different ways. The only thing that I am saying as a head teacher here is 'How good is our school?', and these are the elements that are needed in planning, so those are the only things that I need to see. Do I need to see in the folder? No. Do I need to see them on a bit of paper? No. Can they be on a wall? Can they be on a floor book? Can they be somewhere else? Absolutely. So these elements are all there. They're just not presented in the traditional, 'here is my six week plan with all my outcomes and experiences and everything that we're going to do', way.

### ***Questions drive learning***

Now we have a case where children are asking questions. They're putting them onto walls and floor books, then they're getting their families to ask questions so parents and grannies are all putting in questions for the topics that they've chosen. I mean we've done some weird topics, but I think that shows you the set curriculum doesn't actually follow where children are now, where their interests lie. One of our classes last year that ran with animals and wildlife and we thought, oh god, this is going to run out in six-weeks, but they got a whole year out of it! They categorised it into different habitats that the animals lived in. They researched, they did things that you would never, as a teacher printing a plan off Twinkle, ever found in terms of learning.

One of my primary classes is actually looking at a third level curriculum for excellence, experience and outcome and the teacher's like, 'I can't fit it in'. I said, 'but you are fitting it in!' It doesn't mean that you're teaching it at third level, it means that you're showing them that learning doesn't stop and that they can have a go at any part of learning. No, nobody's stopping them thinking outside the box. One of our little P1s last year when the inspectors were there, could give an unbelievable description of how keratin grows feathers for birds. They studied birds and she could explain the intricacies of the hollowness and how it all works for birds that float and sink and everything and the inspector stood there and you could almost see this gobsmack moment across the inspectors face and they're like, how is that possible? Well, it is possible.

First of all, they're interested, they've asked their own questions. So today we're tackling Karen's question about such and such, how are we going to go about doing that? For some lessons it's like the teachers will take it away and say, 'I'm studying Karen's question. Here's how we're going to approach it'. And for other ones it's like, 'right, come on, let's figure it out'. You tell everybody the subject we're going to do and how we're going to start this. For example, one child this year wanted to know how many sheep there are in the world. So of course they asked the class and they're like, 'oh that's an impossible task'. I remember Rachel, my PT coming back to me, going, it was just one of these moments, the kid was sitting there going, he's like, 'don't be so silly everybody, we just Google it'.

And that's exactly what they did! They got this random number and they're like, 'well how do we know that's real?' So they go into truth and whether it's factually accurate and they're having these amazing goosebump learning moments all of the time. It's not to say they won't pick a traditional topic, for example space has been done and somebody wanted to do conflict and one class this year, so a teacher's come back off a career break, has never taught this before. It's all been here is your six lessons and off you go type of thing. And there were challenges in the classroom and we kind of coached them around and said, so what would make the difference? We asked the teacher, I said, but I'm also going to ask your children. So you go into class and say, well what's going to make the difference?

What's going to give you buy-in to make learning better? So they chose mediaeval history, which is a weird kind of context for Orkney. It's not an Orcadian history, normal topic, but they said, 'oh, but we want to have this and this. We want a castle, we want this. We're going to build a drawbridge'. And I said, well what's stopping you?' And they look at you as if to say, 'oh, are we actually allowed to do it?' 'Of course you are!' So they've made a working drawbridge that you have to pull up and down to get into the classroom door. There's a password for that. They've got a blacksmith area where they've got places that they can pretend to smelt and do all sorts, but it's also, it's got one of those sort of fake fire things in the corner so it's real.

They all choose to work there when they're doing other things because they feel really content. They made a dungeon, but basically the dungeon is where you take your laptop. So you pick up a laptop and you go underneath the counter and it's split in four segments, got fairy lights, but they can do their ICT hidden (well, they say hidden) under a transparent sheet thing. It's one of those spaces, but they are hidden to do their work and are happy there.

They built the kings and queens corner, so that's there. If you're the best person in the classroom, you can get to work over here and it's got lovely cushions and gold tankards you can drink your water out of. They have adapted the whole classroom and this has been going on now for two terms and not once have we said 'No, you need to stop this and move on' because their learning keeps moving on and what they're interested in keeps moving on.

### ***Teachers need support too!***

So now they've done sort of a term of deep learning about loads of different things. They're now showcasing it. They asked 'well how do we do it?' It's like, 'well you tell me, tell us. I'm not going to tell you how to go about it'. So they've decided to do a mediaeval banquet with presentations. They're having ideas, they're building the whole thing to show all the things they have learned and are going to show in their way.

Through this experience, you can see how their behaviour changed, the learning changed, the teacher changed. It's just so powerful. It's unbelievable. Now don't get me wrong, we have had staff who have found it really difficult because they have been quite tunnelled in their ways and believed that this is what we do and here is the set curriculum level for the class taught and this is what they must teach. But as we go on and we adapt and we make tweaks all the way through, we see change. I had a real breakthrough with a member of staff the other week actually, who had finally figured out a learning cycle for their class and found one that they really liked using.

I don't specify 'this is how you're going to do it', I trust them to figure it out with the children that are in front of them. I think if you're not used to being that creative in your own design in your classroom, that is quite a challenge. I still go back in and support teachers, but I want them to get it for themselves. So they have that light bulb moment of, 'yep, I know exactly what I'm doing now'. So that teacher had that moment and suddenly their class is just, it's just completely opened up. Now they're studying, what is it they're studying? They're studying farming, that's what they've chosen. But they're talking about how is AI going to affect farming in the future. Where are we going to, how do we build sustainable buildings that we can grow things in as well as live in? Questions that you wouldn't expect that age group of children to think about - they're mammoth. The teachers suddenly realised by letting them go and using the literacy skills, the research skills that they know, use the math skills, use the ICT skills, the research stuff, use all of those things that they are teaching as a core, then they can actually accomplish some really amazing learning. And they've decided that they're doing presentation boards to show what they're doing this time. Everything is very, very different.

At the end of topics, when they've run the natural course, families and children and staff evaluate. They will come back and say, how's it gone? What did we notice? Is there anything we've missed? So all of the things that you would normally do with 'here is your six weeks of French and all those things', they're already there, they're brought in. What I notice when having plan reviews with teachers and staff is the difference in the knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and learning and teaching opposed to when they first sat down to talk about learning and teaching, it was 'I've got these things to do and this thing to do'.

It was never a context as a whole, and I've always put, the only thing I've probably really pushed is skills-based learning. We started with the four capacities. That was our thing. We were looking at principles, curriculum design and actually as the time has gone on, it is very clear that the way we are working definitely covers four capacities. What it does is it's more in line with the creativity skills, so that's kind of where we are morphing towards and will probably be the thing that we start off with from next year. It's conversations that you hear in the staff room. It's like, 'oh actually those three kids didn't get the topic they wanted'. And somebody else was saying, 'well we had a vote at the start of the year and then we made sure everybody had something on the plan for the year'.

### ***Being inquisitive***

Each class has their topics and when we come to start a new topic, we ask them if it's what they were still interested in and sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't. One teacher recently said that they had to do a mini topic for two weeks to cover one particular child's real interest so that they would buy into something else somebody else developed. They also used a 10-minute research tasks, where things that can't be answered get collected and put on the wall. Then, if kids have finished all their work, they go and pick one of these questions to explore on their own. They go away, do a bit of research, develop their knowledge and bring it back to the group. In this way everybody gets their question answered, their voice heard, and recognised for what they learn.

Every child gets their question answered and takes it back to parents on an online seesaw thing. Everything, it goes in a cycle really, but it wouldn't matter what the content of it is that they taught, it's the fact that they're teaching, 'let's be inquisitive, see where we go, what do we need to figure out whatever is going on, are we problem solving? Are we, what is it that we're doing?' And then we're coming back and saying, 'here's what we've learned or here's what we can't find out yet and how are we going to do that?' So it's kind of where we are. It's not finished, it's not complete. It's not will it ever be complete? No, probably not. That's learning.

**Jane:** What I am really curious about from your perspective is that you arrived at this school and had a real belief that there's a different approach. You said pretty early on your principal teacher was keen and just wanted to be let loose. What I noticed is that potentially some head teachers, from past experience, would be actually 'no, this is how we're going to do it. This is the way, this is the curriculum, this is the structure'; because that's what they know and who they are.

So what are your key things that you have experienced that enabled you to turn up to a new school and be like, 'okay, let's just see what's going on and let's try something new because I've got teachers that are keen'. So that's one bit I'm interested in, the other bit is how have you worked with those teachers and what does that look like in, it doesn't sound like it's a traditional school management structure, but what does it look like in how are you working with those teachers to move to empower them I suppose?

### ***Brave leadership***

**Islean:** I suppose it's quite funny because we have this conversation, Rachel and I, quite an awful lot. I said from day one when I walked into Dounby that all I ever want, all I ever want from everybody is a hundred percent. That there's no point in turning up if you're not interested in working with the kids, for the kids and for each other. That's it. If we are not turning up to strive for, 'let's get a good from our quality assurance' or to strive to get the best that we can get, or if we can't get the best, we need to figure out how do we that. I felt very clear that I was given a school improvement plan from the previous head teacher, which was so disconnected from the children and the staff and the families. Nobody really understood why they were looking at writing for the fifth year running, why it was just stagnant. When I did my interview for the post, I was asked to describe what Dounby school could become for their learners. It was learner focused, which is right up my street. That's always how I've worked.

I did a presentation which was basically what was my vision for a Dounby learner was and I said that I couldn't deliver on a plan that's sitting there completely irrelevant. I also said I was not prepared to write another plan because you can't plan if you don't know what's going on. So I very riskily I suppose, used what I had created for my interview and I never hid that. I said, 'here's my plan, you can look at my presentation, this is what I did and this is what we're going to do and we're going to gather evidence of what it's like. What is it like to be here during the day? What's it like to be teacher? We're going to collect all of that and then figure out where we go'.

I always said I'm not a leader that leads from the front, I am somebody who's in the mix and I'll always be watching what's going on, but I will always make sure it's the right person to think that is not me, that is somebody else within the school that might be the child. For example, last year we did quite a lot of work with Matthew<sup>5</sup>. We did focus groups and we had children and parents in the focus group, and because we were doing a vision for a Dounby learner, we're kind of like, well what's it like to it to be at Dounby school? What's it been previously? What's it like now?

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Sowerby; Hidden Giants, educational innovators/creative practitioners – external change agents

And the previous way was very...I would say dull in its response, but now became something meaningful. It touched the heart of people, if that makes sense. We did creative visualisation very early on with the kids. They said 'oh you need a vision, values and names'. I was like, 'well I do, but I'm not doing it the way you think we're going to do it!' 'We're going to be led by our children and our families and staff'. So basically their feeling of school became this 3D sculpture of someone. Well, Bob...who's away off on his adventures.

### ***Bob: a living, breathing, growing ethos***

Bob is the thing, well the thing that's for everyone as a little bit of him represents something of how our children feel about school. We are developing a lived ethos. I said it to the corporate director, I'm not sure he was really happy about it, but I said, 'I'm not having, I've got a badge, that's fine, but I'm not having an acronym or a whatever. If you want to know what it's like to be a person in our school, talk to the people in our school, look at what they've created, look at how they've got that power'. And it was very, very evident early on because when you could see that the kids were like, 'I just want to try and change', they would hear 'no you can't or we'll figure it out later'. So now it's like 'go away, think about it, come back with a plan and then we'll start'. That's what they did from the start and we created a belonging group who kind of worked on Bob and the ethos. It very quickly set up a community group who were keen to do stuff too, because the school was in a very disconnected place with its local community and it showed they had a very disjointed relationship with the last headmaster. So there wasn't a lot of joined working or thinking. So it was trying to get that connection back in. Staff facilitated the meetings with members of the community, but nothing else. It was entirely learner led.

We then had an influx of other kids and some kids wanted to do research in the classroom about behaviour. So we did that. We started up a communications group because some children thought that sometimes it doesn't work. There is a teacher who's here for deaf pupils and has started looking at doing BSL as a third or fourth language as a whole school. That group's now been running for 12 months or so and they've changed the way that communication happens for children and parents. It's very visual, it's just completely different. It's so much better and they meet monthly and they're in charge. Then spiralling off that, somebody else was like, 'oh well the grounds are rubbish, we want to change that'. I was like, 'okay, come back with a plan'. They even got a teacher involved before they came back. So they're running a sustainability group now and we developing that. We've got another group that then took on the kind of Bob part and that ended up with an offer from the National Galleries to work with them and it became a learner led group. So they decided, decided not me, they decided that we could work everything.

### ***Ownership and responsibility***

I didn't do the interviews for somebody to come and work with the children. They interviewed themselves. They picked who they felt most comfortable working with. So this group worked with Martin, an expressive arts specialists and they did the sort of main thing, but they trickled down everything into class and then brought contributions back from every child in the school into the sculpture that they created that is now winging its way to Edinburgh. Now what they're doing is they're now making a book of their journey and Bob's journey so that they can tell everybody what it's like to be involved at that level. They take full ownership and ask us for help when they need it, for example getting me to literally cry on the phone to the transport company to get them to ship it for not much money! Our job as staff or my job is just to sit back and agree I can do it, that's fine, I'll do that. Or they can march in and go, 'we need this right now'. Might not be right now but okay, tell me what you need and we will figure it out.

The children take ownership of their learning and staff can also take leads on anything that they're particularly interested in. So staff or pupils will say, 'here's something I thought about, could I give it a try?' We will then facilitate with questions like 'how are you going to do that?' So they set that up and kids will lap that up straight away.

I'm in charge if there's any problems and we look to just develop and learn the skills as we go along, I suppose. Staff really needed to know I have their backs, that I am ultimately responsible. It has taken a while to get to this point, and that's a trust thing. It has taken a while to build that level of trust up where staff are really keen to take things on, I think because I reworked the working time agreement and staff had not had to work to a working time agreement fully before. Whereas that was me in the start. I was like, 'oh my god, we've only got 195 hours to fill, we've got so much to do!'. And staff were like, 'what? We have to do 195 hours?!'.

There were many things they'd never heard before and you're like, yeah, this has been the standard introduced, so it was really about re-establishing that. Then they had to get used to things, but they had to figure out that even though you've got this tight collegiate working approach, they've still got so much freedom within it.

Now I would say 50% of staff have got something that they've taken on and they're running themselves and doing themselves. So everything from transition to maths, to grammar progressions, to writing curriculum documents. The only thing we wrote documents for is maths and language and we're working on health and wellbeing. So they've been working on those kind of things, and it's funny, it's the ones who needed the safety that opted into the planning process, and the ones who didn't have opted into doing year group events and are starting to rejig, get family learning back on the go and things like that. So for those that needed it, it's provided the safety they need to put a toe in the water to keep going but also to understand that it's them, they're the best placed to lead at that point.

I suppose that's how I've always worked, but I don't know whether that comes from, I don't know, I've kind of always worked like that. I don't know whether it got to flourish being a teaching head, possibly? You had autonomy and you were in the classroom all the time, so possibly, but I can't think there's been, even as a class teacher.

There hasn't been a time when I have not worked like that. So for me that's the interesting part of it all is who takes that step? Who takes a step forward? And more importantly, who has the conversation? For me it's conversation, it's relationship based. So those are the things that are going to make a change. Dictatorship or a 'here's what you do' thing is never going to make going to make people change as it's not theirs. It's got to be theirs.

**Jane:** This is really interesting if I think about what you are saying through the lens of my PhD research, which is around everyday leadership. I looked at leaders who were creating change in sport, but not people with influence and authority and power. It was people who were doing their everyday roles and really initiating amazing changes. I created themes for each of these and one was a sense of people that they had been around through their life; they all talked about 'great people' who had effectively given them the same kind of leadership that I am hearing you talk about.

The environment and relationships that you are creating in your school. It was almost like they learned to be who they were because they experienced it. So, I'm curious about you and how you got to this point, because as you've said, it's early days at Dounby, and equally you can't remember a time when you didn't teach like this or it believed in this approach. So for me, I'm kind of like, 'oh okay, so where's that come from?', because it isn't standard. It isn't what you would necessarily see in every school and I don't know, you appear able to cascade that forward and bring it to life to create a positive learning environment.

### ***Facilitating leadership***

**Islean:** I don't know, I suppose I did the excellence in headship programme and we did a residential before COVID where they were always asking what your style is and how to identify what you actually do. I don't think I've ever been able to put a pin in it and say that is my type of leadership. I'm quite happy to change. So sometimes there are things you have to say 'I'm really sorry this is me telling you because it's a child protection thing, so this is what I have to do'. But that's me stepping forward because I have to be a leader in that particular role at that time. Then I can step back and say, 'okay, but you're the expert in your class so you explain to me what's happening'. I do that coaching type of thing. I suppose, but I don't know...I have always been brought up to try and get the best out of people that's like, that's always just been me.

I'm never the star of the show, let's put it that way. I'm much better behind the scenes and supporting others than I am being the person at the front. Even when we've had quite a lot of publicity for a lot of things that we've done of late, it's always the people who are doing it that's there. But you see other staff who are like, they're right there at the front, aren't they? And you're like, 'what are you doing?' What are you doing in that picture? That is not about you, it's about the kids. Yeah. Honestly I don't know where it comes from. I think it's just, is it a nature nurture thing? I don't know! It's a difficult one.

**Jane:** I'd be fascinated to explore it more, but that's not for this project. Listening to you speak, though, I think there's things around your values. Knowing what you stand for and what you will accept and not accept. What I'm hearing from you talking is that as a human and a person as head teacher, it is about being people centred. It's about knowing where the boundaries are and stepping in if something is not okay. Also a secure attachment thing in there, where you're kind of like, actually I'm here if you need me, but go do what you need to do. So some of these kind of core things.

When you're talking about your school and teachers and pupils, I'm hearing learner-centred or people centred, feels like the same thing. Teacher-centred. You are trusting others and allowing them freedom and space to explore, and even with things that feel important for you, also that things take you haven't gone in and said, right, this is the new approach, this is how we're going to do it. You've kind of gone and said, 'okay, I know this is different, I know this is going to take time and we need support to create it in the right way so that everybody feels engaged and everybody feels empowered rather than me just going, right day one, sink or swim, off you go'.

**Islean:** Yeah, it needs to be a conversation. If you look back at last year and the school improvement and standard quality reports – weird in a way, but I guess one of the things you do is to go back and look at where you were or you list all your consultation and think 'wow, what have we done?'. I find this really hard because practically every meeting we've had or anything we've done is entirely been consultation. Something has been discussed, we have set an action point, come back to consult and that has continued. So maybe consultation is the right word, it's the continued conversation.

So if somebody finds an element, they think actually a very trivial thing, for example, 'oh I don't like the way that the planning folder content is structured now we have changed it'. Yet we do have a tiny folder now and it's got the things in it that we should really have, yet they now don't like the way it's done. It's like, well how would you do it? Go away, think about it, come back, go away, think about it, come back. Share it with colleagues and ask them to decide whether they like it. So you have this like, oh, 'I was thinking that too' and you develop this sort of collective because it's not me coming and saying 'here is your, here is this, you need to do this, here is this, you need to do it'. It's 'alright. Okay, we've got this thing but we want to tweak it and we want to have it this way and let's try this'. We will then run it for six months and see what happens. So suddenly people are realising that you don't just do it and then change it six weeks later. You've got to have it and let it flourish or let it sink and then do something about either direction that you go in.

### ***It takes time***

Time is the big thing. I think all head teachers are like, this has got to be done by X point in the year and I must have had 52 options of this in my calendar and my approach has never been like that has been. We do what we can manage, but then we'll push in the things that we are really keen for. The things that we really have to do are there, then actually the things that excite us will take over and those are the things that we will do. It was funny this year the local authority stepped in because our attainment), the attainment that I inherited was not great. I refused point blank to match data because I didn't have the evidence, I didn't have professional judgement from teachers, none of the things.

Of course they were then looking at us in detail, which is really scary, never had this. Yet looking at it from my disciplinary point of view, I was like, I taught 60% of last year because we had no staff with COVID and all sorts of different challenges. I knew what is more important to me is that the school is open, the children are safe, they're excited about what they want to learn and staff feel comfortable about what they need to do. Am I bothered too much about the fact that the Scottish government are probably going to go, what's going on there? Because if they are going, what's going on there? We might be more likely to get more support, more help, more of these different things. So they changed, I stood up to lots of changes to our direction but did kind of change a little bit of our school improvement plan, but not the bulk.

Actually I went through very visibly the pain of changing the direction of where I felt we needed to go. And I explained that to staff. I said, 'here's the ideas that you've all had. Yes, attainment has been a little bit off,, but now that's got to take precedent over everything else. So here's what we're thinking'. And I asked them 'What would you do? How would you tackle it?' And then they can see that it's not just them, I'm going through the same things that they might be going through in the classroom with planning, just on a slightly different level. I'm trying to buffer it so it doesn't hit you. Actually it is really interesting, because if that had happened in my first year there, staff might not have bothered at all. But now they're like, you need to spread that load with us.

We need to share it. That in itself is a huge turnaround from where they were waiting for somebody to tell them what to do and offer assurance that it was OK. Now they say 'we'll take this on'. They ask 'what is it?' and want to be involved. So they, we went through the GTSS standards and the standards for professional learning, having not really looked to any of those before. We were looking at those and seeing what is our professional responsibility so that we could plan it back and plan back for the authority. This shows you then that they're beginning to understand where they sit and how they can spread and share what they do positively.

It's not always the things that are written down or documented or put on a Google forum, is it? It's the things that, it's the real things. It's the relational things. Because I'm only ever going to write two policies my whole entire life for this school. One is for learning at Dounby, that's our Dounby Way that we're doing at the moment. And that's learning, teaching, assessment, the whole gamut underneath it. The other one will be a relationships policy and that will be what is the standard for us interacting together and our collective expectations. That'll be really difficult to capture, but it's quite important as the basis under which everything else will fall into place.

**Jane:** There's a couple of things I'm hearing there. There's almost like an action learning approach to everything. That constant cycle and it's not rigid. It's not linear. That's what I'm hearing echoed in what you are saying with pupils, with their learning. Also with staff and that you try something, learn from it, embed it, keep moving forward and that does naturally take time. I think there's also a real clarity over what is important to you and how you then communicate that. So my guess is that people know in your staff team and actually probably your pupils as well, they have a really clear idea of actually what's okay and what's not okay. Also you all know that this is how we treat each other, this is how we work and we cascade that forward into your relationships policy, which is simply 'this is what we accept, this is what we don't accept'.

### ***Exploring problems to generate solutions***

**Islean:** Yes, absolutely. I suppose it's very interesting, you see the kids going from day one where they were just running around and I was wondering 'what is going on here?!' That was just normal, if they didn't like class, they would just come out. That's what they did. And at one point, I think I counted 21 kids, I remember it vividly walking round school on my first day and I said to staff at the end of the day it's like, whoa, what are they all up to? Do you know what they're up to? That's the first question. You can imagine the answers! So very quickly, with the kids, we developed the inside out characters and a sort of stop point type of thing to try and get them to understand what they needed to do if they actually did need to come out of class or not.

Within about a week of it happening, we got them to make displays and did all sorts of different things, like building furniture out of boards as there literally wasn't anything. We created the calm zone, a sort of 'if I'm not well zone', 'if I'm not feeling great or if I'm being sent out of class zone', and it changed the whole dynamic of the school within a week or two because suddenly there was already, okay, this is now the expectation. We hadn't done much, apart from give them little coloured cards for their class, yet automatically it was like, what a big difference! Funnily, I was doing some sort of review a couple of weeks ago and I said, 'so what's the worst thing that's ever happened to your school?' and this boy goes 'I'm not allowed to run around the school anymore. You stopped us doing that!' I said, 'did I stop you doing it?' He went, 'well no, not really.' And then explained the process back and you're like, yep. It's like nice that you blamed me, but...

**Jane:** I think what I'm also hearing you talk about a lot is that you're looking beyond the obvious. With this thing, it would have been easy to say 'ok, kids are coming out of their classrooms and we just need to stop that'. So there could have been a knee jerk response, but you began by questioning why the kids are not engaging or engaged. You asked why they weren't staying and not, how do we immediately get them to go back and stay? I feel like you were immediately thinking about how you kept them safe, which was the driver for then finding a solution. I'm hearing you sit with the questions rather than black and whiteness of you're either in class or you're not. And if you're not, then you've done something wrong and you'll get punished for it almost.

**Islean:** Yes, we took, the kids took punishment away. They designed a scheme themselves. I didn't design it, they designed it. This was actually really interesting because some of the teachers who are part-time maybe weren't at different meetings because they were part-time, even though it's all noted and communicated and everything.

Yet some staff didn't like it and I feel it is because it was hard to be there in the moment of initial discuss to support the children to designed it. They questioned and so we presented a restorative conversation, five point scale, all these different things they're using. It's like it's exactly the same. It was just, green hearts and the kids have the kids created that. They wanted green, it was calm anyway. So is it anything different to what we actually do to explain what's different, what do you need that is different from that? And staff couldn't. And then suddenly it was a moot point because they had exactly the same thing.

It was almost like because a child had designed it, it was too much. So I needed to help staff see that at some points, children can do the things that teachers might do, and that there ideas are equally as valid. That something they have developed and chosen can be as effective as a teacher choosing. But it did take some staff longer to process this. It was really quite interesting. At one point a staff member refused to use the scheme and then the next thing they were using it successfully because of a kid who wasn't having a good time.

The staff member was then like, well actually it all works, doesn't it? And you're like, of course it does. Ultimately it was because the staff member engaged in conversation with their children and they were saying, yeah, we agree this has to go, but we put it on the chart. That is kind of the biggest thing for me. I feel that people just genuinely need time for anything. But if you can give them the time that they need you, everyone always goes, well, you need to bring 80% of the people with you all of the time. Like if you give people enough time, you'll take a hundred percent of the people with you all of the time. It just takes people very different lengths of time to get there.

**Jane:** And that reminds me of something you said earlier on. If I look in a classroom, I'll see kids who are excited by everything and kids who already know and are disengaged. So it's something about meeting people where they're at and understanding where they're at to be able to say, okay, one size won't ever fit all because everybody's at a different. Then asking how do we almost bring enough people along that the others are kind of like, oh, what's going on here? And they're curious enough to be like, actually I want some of that too.

### ***Meeting people where they are***

**Islean:** And I think the kids have adapted to it so quickly, but the staff have needed to go through a few cycles of it. Definitely. It is not new, it's not a new concept, but it is something that's new to them. You can see those, my Principal Teacher for example, she had obviously taken it on and was flying with it and she is the expert and you can see almost by osmosis how that is working.

I've always been somebody who will support staff in classes or in my office, whatever. They always need to be part of that. So they are part of everything. They come to Collegiate, they come to in service, they're part of decision making. They're not a separate entity. And that's been a big change as well because the hierarchy has gone. So we still have some staff but we'll get there. I'm determined to get there.

I now understand how different staff work. For some it's hierarchy, and some folks need to have their place in the hierarchy to feel comfortable. Everybody who's a support staff have often been viewed as not on the same level as teachers, so when they're making decisions, teaching staff can find that incredibly difficult because they can't deal with the imbalance of the perceived hierarchy. What I've managed to do is give staff a lead and suddenly they have been given the chance to see actually that they can't do it on their own. Sometimes staff want to do it on their own and be this amazing 'I can do everything' person, yet you can see they are already realising, no, they need to take their kids with them.

**Jane:** I've just written down something about distributed power and shared power across the school, which is the community of parents, of everybody. It's like, and I think maybe power and responsibility with that. Yes. So there's responsibility from teachers, but also pupils responsibility for their learning and for each other and for delivering what they say they're going to do and that sort of thing. So that feels important.

**Islean:** You're right though, if you come and see it, it's a funny thing. It's a thing that you feel over a thing you can describe more than anything else. I also think, though, from working in a different authority, so when I would do my PDRs, my reviews, it'd be like, oh yeah, this is wonderful. It'll work in a school when you're only working with a small number of children for a long time. It's kind of like you need a different challenge. And that was really the only thing that I was looking for that was different – to try and do the things that worked really well in a different setting, because everyone had always said, no you can't; no, it won't work.

But actually it does! So I've always said, I feel this is a way that could work everywhere, but you need somebody, you need people to want to take the risk and to put the time in and to value people over systems and processes because the systems and processes will always still be there. Whatever form they package them in, they'll always still be there. But if you've got all the other three things, then you don't need those things that almost irrelevant. I think.

**Jane:** I'll just package that sentence and that can be the research report. Perfect. Done. You've just done my job for me!



## A PUPILS' PERSPECTIVE

The transcript of a conversation with a group of P5 pupils in the 'calm zone' area before their Mediaeval lunch and banquet. Bringing the learning and school environment to life!

**Jane:** So I want to know all about what you do. Who's going to start and tell me?

**Alastair:** Me?

**Jane:** Yeah, go on! Tell me your name first.

**Alastair:** Alistair.

**Jane:** So tell me Alistair, what you do.

**Alastair:** We do spelling, maths, RME...

**Jane:** What does RME stand for?

**Alastair:** Religious Moral Education.

**Jane:** Ah, thank you! Cool. And tell me about...what I hear is that you've got banquet this afternoon.

**Alastair:** Yeah! Since we're doing a mediaeval topic and at the end of term, well near enough, we're doing the banquet and tomorrow are we do going to, where are we going...?

**Pupil 1:** To Skaill house.

**Jane:** Oh, that sounds very interesting! So how come you've ended up doing a banquet this afternoon?

**Alastair:** Because...because we wanted to! We had a sale and raised a lot of money. So Ms Gibson said we could have a banquet and we've been making stuff and today's when we're doing it. Supposed to be on Tuesday but got changed to Thursday.

**Jane:** So what will you be doing in your banquet?

**Alastair:** Eating food.

**Jane:** Any food? What sort of food?

**Alastair:** Beef, pork. Beef, beef, crackers and cheese. Okay. And Butter. People went yesterday going get meat and it was me, me and our friend Eva.

**Jane:** So where...so you got the meat locally?

**Alastair:** Yeah, we just walked down the shops and got some meat.

**Jane:** Oh nice. What else? Why did you do medieval?

**Alastair:** So why did we do mediaeval? Why did we start? Because we voted. Yeah, we have a vote at the end and start, start of terms. And we had...was it farming before? Yeah. Yeah. And then we went Mediaeval. Mediaeval. Yeah.

**Jane:** So how did you come up with those different topics?

**Alastair:** Because people, our teacher, said what do you want to do? And then everyone said. So Ali said farming, then our teacher would say put your hand up for farming. Then it had like eight votes and then mediaeval had seven, seven votes. Yeah. But then we just did, after farming we would do mediaeval and then the others and then mostly everyone voted for mediaeval. Then we started and then we did a thing called 10 minute research. We had all these questions we wanted, if we all did 10 minute research, we could, like, cover it in a class.

**Jane:** Oh, okay. I get it! What were you going to add? You had your hand up. What did you want to tell me?

**Pupil 2:** I was just going to say the same as him. Just this.

**Jane:** Oh, have you got anything else to add?

**Pupil 2:** No.

**Jane:** No problem. Did he sum up your thoughts? Excellent. OK, so go on. Go ahead. So you all came up with the mediaeval theme, then what did you do next?

**Pupil 3:** Questions. We got questions and then a focus group went with a teacher and then we chose what they wanted. And then another focus group went with a teacher and then decided where is it going to be? Like we had pretty plans on a bit of paper. Yeah.

**Jane:** Can you remember what sort of questions you all came up with?

**Pupil 4:** We had castles and knights, kings and queens. Weapons. Yeah, art and I don't remember well, weapons and armoury.

**Pupil 5:** And plague. Plague kind of. Because we have, you have you loads of questions and your family gave questions too.

**Jane:** Oh, you asked your family about questions?

**Pupil 5:** Yes. It was like 'does your family want to add any questions?' And we had that for firemen too.

**Jane:** So were your questions better or were your family's questions better?

**Pupil 5:** It depends. Depends who had the questions.

**Jane:** Yeah. So who gave better question? Who asked the most interesting questions?

**Pupil 5:** Us.

**Jane:** You. Oh, why do you think you asked the most interesting questions?

**Pupil 5:** You know, just because of the sort of things we wanted to know? Like food. What type of food did they eat in Mediaeval times.

**Pupil 6:** Wait. Did they get at the minute we're doing farming and then mediaeval farming?

**Pupil 5:** Yeah.

**Pupil 6:** So we then wanted to know how did they get the food? How do they cook their food and stuff?

**Jane:** I see. So how did they cook food?

**Pupil 6:** Well they get a fire and then they get a big pig. Yeah. They put a pig on a stick.

**Jane:** Oh, like a pig roast?

**Pupil 6:** Yes. We were going to have one and it got stood on. Yeah. It got stood on.

**Teacher:** Yes. We were going to have a spit roast at the banquet but sadly the spit roast got trampled by cattle a couple of weeks ago.

**Pupil 7:** Oh no. I didn't know. So we haven't got that thing. But I think maybe he would've tasted better on the floor.

**Pupil 8:** I think it was when it was nice weather and the cows were put in the shed and with the calves and I think they got a bit jumpy and excited and when it was nice weather and the cows just trampled it .

**Jane:** Cows are quite scary. Did you know...here's a fact for you. Did you know that more people a year get killed by cows than sharks?

*[Pupils all excitedly say yes, put their hands up!]*

You knew that already? No way! I should have guessed.

**Pupil 8:** Yeah. No, not our farm.

**Jane:** Oh, because you...ah, okay. Who here comes from farming then?

*[Several pupils put their hands up.]*

**Jane:** So quite a few of you. So you see how some of these things work? Do You live on a farm?

**Pupil 9:** I wish the pig was still alive.

**Pupil 10:** What? The pig is alive. It wasn't stamped on.

**Pupil 9:** Well what got trampled?

**Pupil 10:** The actual spit roast. Not the pig. The spit roast. The thing that you use to cook it. That. Not the actual pig! The roast.

**Jane:** Oh I see!!! It's okay. It's okay. It was not a pig. That pig did not get trampled.

**Pupil 10:** Well then why don't we get the pig?

**Pupil 9:** Because we've got nothing to cook on. It wouldn't be a proper spit roast would it?

**Pupil 10:** The oven is tiny. And you couldn't put it on the fire I suppose.

**Pupil 9:** Yeah.

**Jane:** So you had a whole load of questions then. And we've worked out that your questions were better than your family's questions. Yeah. Yeah. That's cool. What do you then do when you've got your questions? What then happens?

**Alastair:** Like 10 minutes. 10 minute research and there's like...

**Jane:** Why only 10 minutes?

**Alastair:** We are supposed to do it fast I guess. Fast.

**Pupil 4:** And then you have to write it on the thing. We have sticky notes and we write in our questions.

**Jane:** What questions were the 10 minute research for?

**Pupil 7:** Ones that don't belong in any of the other groups.

**Jane:** Oh, okay.

**Pupil 7:** Like random questions.

**Jane:** So random things. I see. So is your 10 minute research when is things that don't quite fit into the main subject?

**Pupil 7:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Jane:** Okay. And what happens next then?

**Pupil 11:** What does happen then, when we've got...we made a timeline about different events and put it on our wall. Then we did the sticky notes about that timeline out of our time of research or whatever and when they're answered, then they're stuck on the timeline.

**Pupil 8:** So yeah, they get the questions and then because we normally get quite a lot of questions. They are grouped and they're put on the board.

**Jane:** That seems like a sensible thing. So do you all do the same thing and all do the same questions or do you do what interests you?

**Pupil 8:** We do the same. Yeah. And eventually get around all of them. You don't do the same question because each of you has a different question on there. Then you go, you work through it. So you write your own question but then you don't always answer that unless it's in the 10 minute research.

**Jane:** Okay, so then you all get your question answered eventually?

**Pupil 8:** Yeah.

**Pupil 2:** We get laptops to do the 10 minute research. So we Google search and things.

**Pupil 3:** Yeah, we have class laptops.

**Jane:** Nice. So tell me more. So when you've got a timeline, you've got your 10 minute research, you've got different topics and different questions. So how have you gone from all of that to then having a banquet this afternoon? There must be lots of stuff that's happened in between.

**Pupil 4:** Well we made stuff out of cardboard. And wallpaper.

**Jane:** Like what did you make?

**Pupil 7:** Did you go to our classroom?

**Jane:** Yes.

**Pupil 7:** Well you know what? You go into our classroom right? And there's a drawbridge? That's made out of paper.

**Jane:** Is it? That's quite cool. How long that take? I did notice I had to come in. I had to come in through the drawbridge. I was a little bit scared that I was going to get my head chopped off or something.

**Pupil 11:** When you come into our classroom, I would always wave. Then we put the dead skeleton there.

**Jane:** Has it got a name? The skeleton?

**Pupil 3:** Yeah, he, no, it's banjo. He just stands there to guard the place.

**Jane:** A bit scary! But cool. So tell me about the banquet this afternoon?

**Pupil 6:** Well for the banquet this afternoon we are having, there's like, yeah, we're going to have our plays, our model farms, our stuff that we've all made and we have these presentations to say how it was and how the fields were. Like they rotated every year and there'd be like two barley or oat fields and then our grass fields for our cattle. And then they would do crop rotation. So there would be crops in two fields, animals in one field because you have got three fields. So every field would get used up then changed so the field to the barley field would be the grass and then the others would be barley and like that.

**Jane:** So is that in mediaeval times? And that still happens today? I think, does it?

**Pupil 8:** No, they couldn't use the same fields for there was no fertiliser. So since we have silage, we don't need rotation. So, like, all the poop comes through, goes into a big fertiliser. Sorry. Yeah, it comes and gets sucked up from a tanker and then gets spread it on your field. So it's like you don't need to move them around. You can look after the soil because of the things that we do now, but they couldn't do that in Mediaeval times.

**Jane:** I see

**Pupil 1:** A thing called manure it also helps.

**Pupil 6:** It's not manure, no, it's...that is like, that's like cow poop isn't it?

**Pupil 8:** Yeah. No, no fertiliser.

**Jane:** Oh it's fertiliser. Okay.

**Pupil 8:** Yeah. Can we remember what else we've done?

**Jane:** I have a question first though. Yeah. *[Turns to Alastair]* How did you get paint in your hair and on your head?

**Alastair:** I put my hand in the paint and then I went like this...*[runs hand through hair]*

**Jane:** Ha!

**Alastair:** I know. I've got some in here as well. Yeah, a bit here as well.

**Jane:** But it looks like maybe you could say it's mediaeval war paint or something.

**Alastair:** Yeah, I have a lot of black!

**Jane:** *[Turning to a group of three girls]* So tell me about what you're wearing then.

**Pupil 12:** Well this is for our mediaeval play because we've had to make our plays which we are going to act in front of all parents.

**Jane:** How does that feel?

**Pupil 12:** It's fine. It feels OK. This is a pendulum.

**Jane:** That's good. You seem to know what you're talking about! So have you made your costumes?

**Pupil 13:** Well our group has, there's like a clothes box and whatever and it has all the clothes in it. Like that stock, we would go to that and pack out the stuff that we need.

**Jane:** So this, is this a mediaeval outfit then you're wearing? Yeah. What would this, who would be wearing that?

**Pupil 12:** I'm a surgeon.

**Jane:** You're surgeon?

**Pupil 12:** Yeah. I'm a surgeon. We cut people open. We are the Gruesome Girls.

**Teacher:** Why don't you tell Jane about your Gruesome Girls.

**Jane:** What's it called? Gruesome girls?

**Pupil 14:** Yes. Gruesome Girls. Gruesome Girls. We used to do it every Friday. It was like a doctor's office and then patients would come and then we'd like try and fix them.

**Jane:** Oh okay. So what sort of, so did, I'm guessing in mediaeval times you didn't have things like anaesthetic and antiseptic...?

**Pupil 14:** You might not be okay, but we had some sort of surgical tools. Like a hammer, brutal.

**Jane:** Oh! So what sort of operations would you perform? Do you chop people's legs off and things?

**Pupil 12:** Yeah. We chopped his ear off.

**Jane:** Oh nice. Why? What was wrong with it?

**Pupil 14:** He didn't hear anything. He was just hearing this beautiful noise out of their ear.

**Jane:** Oh, so you just decided that was enough? He needed his ear chopped off. Fair enough.

**Pupil 13:** *[Giggles]* Yeah. And then when it doesn't go well, they either get in the poisonous dungeon or under the table in the fire.

**Jane:** Do you have actually have a Gruesome Girls poison dungeon where you throw people?

**Pupil 13:** Yeah. And rocks to throw at you.

**Jane:** Okay, do not, please don't throw me in there.

**Pupil 12:** I think we probably would.

**Jane:** OK. I like your honesty. Thank you. Do you actually get any patients?

**Pupil 13:** Yeah! People come and see us in privilege time. We have privilege time every Friday and run a surgery. We have a reception and patient room and everything.

**Jane:** I'm not sure. Even if my arm was hanging off, I'm not sure I'd want to come and see you! Although it does look like you've been kind to a seal and bandaged it quite nicely.

**Pupil 12:** Hmm. Actually we broke it. It was OK when it came to us and we kind of experimented.

**Jane:** What?!! It was healthy and then it came to you and now its...

**Pupil 12:** It's got a broken arm. The seal. Broken.

**Jane:** Oh, nice. So how are your operations as gruesome girls? Do you think most of them would be successful or do you think most of them would be unsuccessful?

**Pupil 13:** Most of them die.

**Jane:** Okay.

**Pupil 13:** Yeah. But I don't even think there's one patient that's survived.

**Jane:** Excellent. I don't think I'd want to come to your surgery on Friday.

**Pupil 12:** I think you should. Yeah.

**Jane:** I, I'd be a little worried as to whether I'd survive! I don't think I like the sound of the poison dungeon! Are you doing a play on this?

**Pupil 13:** Yeah. This is why I've dressed like that.

**Jane:** Excellent.

**Pupil 12:** The leeches would suck the blood. All your bad blood. Dude, they still use leeches sometimes, don't they? And I had to make leeches, but people has to go out and some people has to go out and live with them and put them in a glass container and lock them in there.

**Jane:** So a leech collector? That was a job?

**Pupil 12:** Yeah, that was a job. That was me. Actually it was my job, but then I didn't like to do it. So I gave it to her.

**Jane:** You decided you wanted to be a Gruesome Girl instead. That's fair enough. Was that a good job to have?

**Pupil 12:** I was a receptionist and I point at a lot of people.

**Jane:** So are you like an angry receptionist, do you think?

**Pupil 12:** I was a bit evil. Yeah. I'd tell the boys and point at them. Yeah.

**Jane:** So what other sort of jobs, what was the worst job that you could have in mediaeval times?

**Pupil 6:** Like with the stool? No. No. That was the best job you could get.

**Pupil 3:** Yeah. That was an honour, that job. You were looking after the rich people. Well the worst job would've been the peasant.

**Jane:** The peasant?

**Pupil 3:** Yeah if you were a peasant, you had the worst jobs. I think the worst thing do is like a plague doctor or something.

**Jane:** A plague doctor?

**Pupil 3:** Yeah. They only had their mask. Their mask to protect them. Nothing else. They actually had flowers or something to hide it or something.

**Jane:** Doesn't sound like a very fun time to live. It sounds like quite a sort of gruesome time to live. It sounds like there quite brutal things happening.

**Pupil 13:** Pee. Oh yeah, we used pee. Pee on your bad stuff. It, that doesn't sound good. Once you had a broken arm in the...we were watching histories and someone had a broken arm or something, It was like 'take your shoe off and pee on it and that was supposed to heal it'. This doctor did it for every single injury.

**Jane:** Excellent. So what else, what other sort of thing, what do you reckon a sort of standard day would be in mediaeval times?

**Pupil 13:** Dying. Fire. A lot of dying. They used to shout. Was it when they threw the poop? The window. What's it called?

**Jane:** So there was no sewers? There was no fresh water at your taps.

**Pupil 13:** No.

**Jane:** So how did they wash? Or wash their hands before they ate dinner?

**Pupil 4:** They still washed, if they were a king. But if you're a peasant, you didn't have anybody doing that for you did you? You probably didn't wash.

**Pupil 6:** No. You just probably like the black death, all the peasants. There's a few that lived so the rich people would pay them more. So most peasants who lived got paid more. But people died. So then they would get paid even more because they survived.

**Pupil 7:** Yeah, like if there was two farms and they would be working, they would get paid like more because the kings needed them to produce food and stuff. More people died, which meant there was less people growing food, but less people eating so you don't have to work as much. Yeah.

**Jane:** So what sort of jobs sort of jobs happened in mediaeval times that still happen today. Like we have got doctors, but thankfully doctors are a bit more kind, compassionate and have a bit more skill than mediaeval doctors.

**Pupil 13:** But mediaeval doctors were better!

**Jane:** Better. You think they were better?

**Pupil 13:** *[Giggling]* Yeah.

**Jane:** Do you think you'd have liked to have been a mediaeval doctor?

**Pupil 13:** Yes!

**Jane:** I sense a little bit of an evil streak there somewhere!

**Pupil 7:** And also say if like the King wanted anything, they'd have to get a horse and go off. They grew food and then they'd have to give it to the King.

**Pupil 8:** And the Queen.

**Pupil 7:** Yeah, some of it. They had to give the food then to the rich and then they'd eat the rest.

**Jane:** So farming feels like it was quite important as everyone needed food.

**Pupil 8:** Yeah, it still is still, it's really important. We make beef at our farm.

**Jane:** Do you? Beef? I had a really nice steak the other day.

**Pupil 8:** What kind?

**Jane:** A rib eye. Delicious.

**Pupil 15:** I make lamb. Yeah, I love lamb because it's my favourite of animal. And they're good. They do taste good.

**Jane:** I've noticed how many cows there are in Orkney because this is my first trip here.

**Pupil 8:** There's like 63,000.

**Jane:** Wow. That's a lot of cows and a lot. I haven't seen that many sheep. So what sort of food did they eat in medieval times then?

**Pupil 2:** Bread. Cheese. Cheese. Cheese. Wine. Wine. Wine and beer.

**Pupil 3:** They never had beer.

**Pupil 2:** Well. What's that thing then? That thing made out of honey...?

**Pupil 3:** Mead. Yeah. Honey lemonade. It tastes good. Mead.

**Jane:** I've never tried it.

**Pupil 4:** I know we had a group yesterday, we do circle time every morning. The group yesterday we tried obviously non-alcoholic mead.

**Pupil 6:** I was in the group. It was alright. I did make it lumpy, the cinnamon and the nutmeg didn't dissolve.

**Jane:** Sounds fun! So what's the most fun thing about how you've learned about the mediaeval stuff?

- Pupil 1:** The banquet. That's the most exciting bit.
- Jane:** OK. So what about how you've learned about the stuff for the banquet? Think about how you chose the topic. So what's the difference between how you used to have topics and now? Now what do you notice?
- Pupil 2:** We choose things we like rather than things we don't care about. Yeah.
- Jane:** And what difference does that make if you are choosing stuff that you like?
- Pupil 3:** It makes it interesting. Interesting learning because it used to be set topics every year and now we get to do stuff we want to learn.
- Jane:** How do you feel about learning stuff now compared to maybe how you used to learn? I feel like what I have heard from you is you are enthusiastic about what you are learning and you are keen. Do you think a few years ago if I'd have come you'd have been so enthusiastic?
- Pupil 5:** No.
- Jane:** OK. So what would I, if I'd have come a few years ago, what would I have seen?
- Pupil 2:** I think maybe everyone is bored. *[Giggling and pretending to sleep]*
- Jane:** What are you doing?
- Pupil** I was sleeping!
- Pupil 12:** You wouldn't have seen this room. Not like this.
- Jane:** So how long has this room been here?
- Pupil 12:** Er. I just, since last year I think.
- Jane:** I like this room.
- Pupil 12** It's a good room.
- Jane:** Yeah. It feels like a good And it's light and bright space. That feels nice.
- Pupil 2:** The floor is nice and it's got heating. We can come here if we need time out or a nice place just to sit. If we need to come out of class or something. I like these big chairs.
- Jane** So what is the best thing about Dounby primary school?
- Pupil 9:** Because we get picked for everything. Yeah, we get to do fun stuff. Have a banquet and go on trips. We're going to trip tomorrow. We get to do, we get to do everything like our class, do everything. I don't know what we've missed out. We've done everything.
- Pupil 10:** We did a Ninja Warrior thing? It was fun. And we did...what else did we do?

**Pupil 3:** We did Dounby's Got talent last year.

**Jane:** Oh yeah. Who was in Dounby's Got Talent? *[Hands go up; a chorus of 'me']*

**Jane:** So who did what?

**Pupil 2:** Me, Ki, you and Ryan. Yeah, we were...

**Jane:** Did you make a boy band?

**Pupil 2:** No! But it was...we did this thing and it was really fun.

**Jane:** *[to pupil 5]* What did you do?

**Pupil 5:** We did it with like, she's not in this room. Did like this thing. We sang.

**Jane:** What did you sing? What sort of sort of music did you sing?

**Pupil 5:** Are we doing it again this year?

**Teacher:** Yes. I anyone going to enter this year? Have I actually told you guys that? Yes, we are organising it!

**Jane:** So what else do I need to know about Douby school?

**Pupil 1:** The children are really cool? It's a small school but has a lot of nice children.

**Pupil 7:** And the community.

**Jane:** What about the community?

**Pupil 7:** We have two fridges in the foyer. Community fridges.

**Pupil 16:** One is a freezer. Robbie.

**Pupil 7:** One is a freezer. Yes. You just go in there and take get food. Yeah. If you need it. In the community.

**Pupil 2:** I'm pretty sure they have vegan bacon in that fridge.

**Jane:** Vegan bacon? No. Wrong. Vegan bacon is just wrong!

**Pupil 8:** No. Do you know burgers? Not vegan? Like burgers are meat? You can't have vegan bacon.

**Pupil 2:** Yes you can. They have it in the fridge and some people want it cos they are vegetarian.  
*[The bell rings]*

**Jane:** OK. I am going to stop recording there as I think you need to be somewhere else. Thank you all for sharing your stories and medieval stuff with me!

# DOUNBY IN PICTURES

Clear learning intentions



Celebrating success



#BeMoreBob



Hopes and dreams







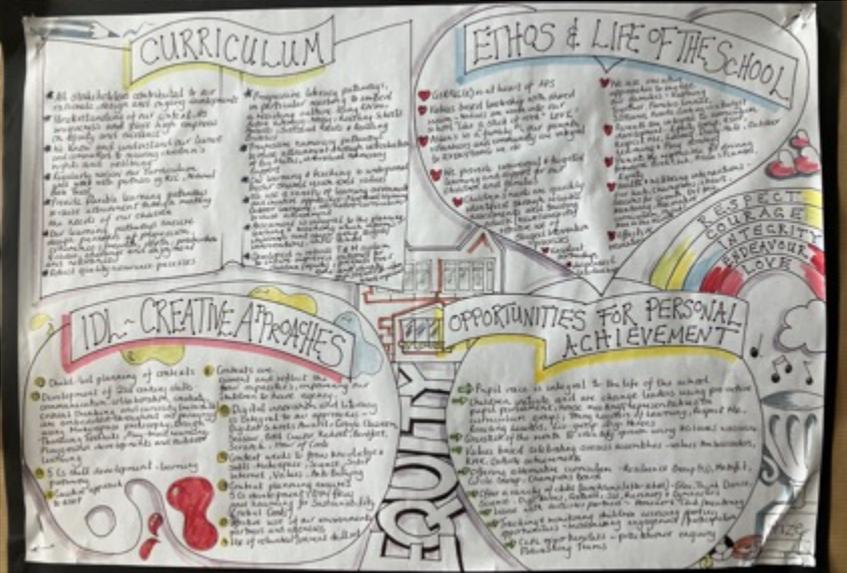
**PART TWO:**

**ALLAN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL,  
STIRLING**

# PART TWO: ALLAN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, STIRLING

Part two of this book shares two perspectives on the development of the creative learning culture at Allan's Primary School, Stirling. The interview with Clare Hoare, Creative Learning Officer (Stirling Council) was recorded via zoom during the early stages of the research project. The interview with Lindsey Howland (Head Teacher) and Shirley Toole (Depute Head) was recorded in person during a research visit to the school on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2023.

Allan's Primary is a vibrant, bustling school in the centre of Stirling. It places pupil wellbeing and love at the heart of their ethos and is being recognised by National schemes and awards for the work they do around trauma-informed practice and respecting children's rights.



## **CLARE HOARE, CREATIVE LEARNING OFFICER, STIRLING COUNCIL**

**Jane:** So my question is how did we get here?

**Clare:** How did we get here?

**Jane:** Yes! Go back and tell me your story. It doesn't have to be in a logical time order, just tell me what has happened. What ingredients have been put into the mix? What has happened to get us to the point that we are now here evaluating these two creative learning schools...?

### ***'There has to be more to it than this!'***

**Clare:** I probably will meander backwards and forwards. So excuse me if I do that. I think it was a meeting of minds that was key, and that this meeting happened at the right time. Lindsey and I had both been asked to be part of a group that was looking at 21st century learning in Stirling. There was a group, (and it was a pretty large group), that had been brought together to think about what were the skills that children and young people need in the 21st century and to contemplate how education can support the development of those skills.

Initially there was a focus on skills and skills development in the context of learning and teaching that exists today...making skills more explicit through that learning and connecting to jobs that might exist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in particular jobs that might exist in Stirling. For some of us who were part of the group we felt there was an opportunity to rethink teaching and learning, bringing learning and teaching into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, making skills development central to this. Lindsey and I started to speak after each of the meetings. We had never met before, yet we felt so connected in our belief that there was a brilliant opportunity to rethink education and learning in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We both felt strongly that learning needed to change. So we just carried on those conversations. We began to explore research and writing by NESTA, OECD, World Economic Forum, Centre of Real World Learning, Creativity, Culture and Education and Sir Ken Robinson.

### ***Curiosity at the heart of learning***

As we talked and got to know each other, there were two aspects that really drew myself and Lindsey together initially; the first was the concept of Maker Spaces. I'd been looking at Maker Space a good few years beforehand and looking at some schools in America that used the concept as a way for learning to happen. I had already proposed a big, expensive capital build in Stirling alongside one of our secondary schools where we would create a space for young people and professionals to work together to try and solve problems. That, however, was a big dream and I needed to start smaller because that original idea was just not possible.

I had also done some training in design thinking and I was really interested in how the process of design thinking could be used to support learning. At that point, though, I hadn't found anyone that was particularly interested in trying that out and taking it forward. I had tried it out with one secondary school and dabbled with the idea, but it needed a school to take it on longer term to understand the impact of using the process. Then, through our conversations, I discovered that Lindsey was really, really interested in the Maker Space concept and how this could connect with our desire to explore skills for the 21st century. We also shared a curiosity about what those skills actually were and then how we could develop them in schools.

Through the big group, we found something that existed already in America called the 'Four Cs', which are creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration, and both Lindsey and I felt that we needed to add curiosity as that really sat at the heart of any approach to learning and to the 4C's. We were really, really quite adamant and determined about adding curiosity! Not everyone agreed. There were discussions around whether curiosity was a skill or an aptitude and whether it could be taught. Both Lindsey and I felt it could be nurtured and modelled. A teacher who is curious and shares this with their pupils would naturally nurture pupils who are curious. It was really important to Lindsey and I.

So Lindsey decided that she would adopt a 5Cs focus for their curriculum at Allan's Primary School and took curiosity as a fundamental element. The 21st century skills group unfortunately stopped with COVID and has not come back together again in the same way, but Lindsey really wanted to incorporate some of what had been discussed within Allan's Primary School.

### ***From Maker Space to Design Thinking and beyond...***

So we made a start together and tried out some Maker Space ideas. When we started at Allan's, we thought initially of Maker Space as a physical room and a physical space with equipment, so we started looking into buying equipment for a Maker Space; digital printers and different seating to make it into a more creative industries based environment. Yet as we progressed with these conversations and ideas, it dawned on us that what the space risked becoming was a very, very well stocked art room! We then started to ask questions around how was this space going to be different to an art room and any other space in the school?

And that is where design thinking came in. We started speaking about the design thinking process and realised that actually it would be the processes and how we approached that space and how learning is taken forward in that space, that would become the thing that would be different. So the thinking process became central to the development of Maker Space at Allan's Primary and the 'thing' that could be central to creating a curriculum for the 21st century. It was this thinking approach that helped to drive a curriculum which is project based, enables subjects to be taught as part of problem solving and that also incorporates and develops those skills that children are going to need when they leave school and progress beyond into life and in work.

The basic stages of design thinking are empathy, research, reflection, ideation and prototype, and then testing of the prototype. It's a non-linear process, so you go back and forth through the process as much as necessary. Reflection is essential. This could challenge traditional teaching practice because all of a sudden it wasn't around doing something specific and directive where there is already a known answer or outcome to the question being asked – the known knowns - where knowledge is provided through text books or sheets, and it is usually based on one subject i.e. geography. We could see that by using the design thinking process and ethos as part of Maker Space it had the potential of changing the practice of teaching at Allan's (and beyond) because the approach necessitated a different way of teaching – of being in the classroom. The class teacher would become a facilitator, supporting pupils to use the process to understand the problem or challenge posed and to generate innovative solutions using the 5C's.

To begin, a question or a problem would be set and the children then had to work together to think about why that was a problem or who that might be a problem for (this is empathy). We then brought this in as a basis for any problem or challenge that they were set, which meant that they had to dig quite deep into the challenge to really get to the bottom of the challenge.

We would ask them to think of around 10 ‘what, why, who, when, where?’ questions and this would then lead into effective research. As this was done in small groups, it meant that every group ended up exploring different aspects. This, therefore, became very much child-led, teacher facilitated, which changes the dynamics of the classroom.

Each group would then go away and do their own research, consulting online resources, books, organisations and people, before coming back together to share what they had found. This felt really important because it wasn’t about putting your arms around your work and not sharing that with your colleagues in school because you needed to protect your own achievements. Whatever research was done was shared and then together the class would think about the original question, the challenge and wonder whether we were asking the right questions? Should we be asking different questions? Once this was decided the children would reflect on the research to start to define what the problems is, why it is a problem, who it is a problems for etc. and conclude the information gathered from the research.

From there, the children would go on to start ideating lots and lots of solution ideas, whether that was a written piece of work, whether it's a designed piece of work or whatever felt good for them. Then again, they'd go back, reflect and consult with one another, then build on what they had done until they had decided on the best solution and created the prototype. This prototype was then shared with the class, who would ask questions about how it solves the problem posed, offering further ideas and advice for improvements, and then shared with the wider school.

### ***Inspiring others – cascading the concept***

Very quickly after we introduced these ideas into Allan’s, a wonderful teacher called Thomas began to embrace the ideas and approach and he took it on first of all, with his class to see how it worked. At the time he said that he was a teacher that very much liked to control things in his classroom – I certainly don’t see this in him now! He liked to have a plan and he liked to know exactly what he was doing each day, but somehow he knew that it wasn't quite right. So he took on this task with design thinking and he saw how his children thrived and children that wouldn't easily engage, would engage and children that are usually very quiet being heard as they offered their opinions. So he was fascinated by how this had worked and how the children, when they were set another challenge or problem, which wasn't a Maker Space challenge, would ask to use the design thinking process again.

For example, they'd been asked to think about how they might create something for the local community and the children said, ‘oh, but can we use the Maker Space process to do this?’ So it was quickly evident that it was something that they enjoyed using and found useful and interesting. They already recognised that by using the process they would be designing something that the community needed rather than something that the children felt the community needed.

Thomas saw how the children in his class could also speak about how they saw themselves being creative and how they collaborated and how they thought critically about the work they were doing. All of a sudden, these skills that we'd been thinking about in theory, were emerging as evident in practice. We saw the children already finding out about themselves, the skills they have and how they can apply them in different places.

The beauty when you go into Allan's Primary School is that the children speak about those skills on a day-to-day basis. They know exactly what collaboration is and they know what creativity is and they know what critical thinking is. Skills that certainly, when I left secondary school, I wouldn't have been able to speak about, and they're doing it at primary school! And so because of Thomas's success with that, it was rolled out across the school.

Thomas took the lead on things and we created a toolkit, to be used in school and on a termly basis. Now, Allan's have Maker Space Weeks each term, where Thomas usually sets a challenge or a class teacher will set a challenge and the full week will be a Maker Space week. And at the end of that week, children share the work that they've done with the rest of the school and speak about the work. And often it will have a focus around something that the school is working on, and often it will have a focus around the rights of the child as well, or climate change or learning for sustainability. So there's usually a really important focus to that work.

### ***This is just the start***

It has been interesting seeing the impact of Maker Space across the school. I mean, it's absolutely Thomas who leads Maker Space now. He speaks about how his practice has changed. I was in his classroom on Wednesday and his approach is very much around teacher facilitation and child-led learning. His classroom looks different, he has sofas in his classroom, he has high tables. The children can stand if they want to stand rather than sit down and they can choose where they work. The children are very confident to work in groups by themselves and call on Thomas when they need him. There was a beautiful moment recently when one of the pupils asked Thomas at the end of the day if Thomas could make sure something was ready for them for the following day so that they were able to complete a task Thomas had set for them, and Thomas said he would make sure it was done. The positive impact for that child of feeling very comfortable to ask a teacher for something to be ready for them and being heard - independent learning, planning ahead, knowing what he needed to complete a task, being completely embedded in that work and responsible for it. Important skills for his future in life, learning and work.

Quite a few teachers at Allan's PS embraced Maker Space and it created a conversation within the school around what learning and teaching might be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And you have the most wonderful head teacher in Lindsey Howland and Depute in Shirley Toole who have an absolute trust in their staff and absolute trust in the children in the school, and also a total belief in love and nurture as being a key to helping her community thrive.

And I think with the evident change and discussion around teaching practice across the school, Lindsey and Shirley have become more confident of doing things another way. They are confident to say, 'right, I want love to sit at the heart of this school. I want love to sit at the heart of our values. And I'm happy to say that love sits at the heart of our values'.

As a result, Lindsey and Shirley have created a curriculum and a community built on love and nurture and a trust that all children have a lot to offer but that it might be hidden deep for some. As teachers and any of us involved at the school, you know you have a responsibility to dig deep to find out what the child or children you are working with is passionate about, what their individual skills are, what they know and would like to know. Knowing that for many children at Allan's Primary School, there are struggles and there's trauma, teaching actually has to be done with gentleness and kindness and love. And in Allan's, I see that happening every day.

There is also a real togetherness between the staff, which is very, very much led by Lindsey and Shirley. There's a 'doors open' policy within the school, so Lindsey and Shirley's door is always open unless they're obviously having a confidential meeting. Children and staff are allowed in their room at all times. There is permission to hug children. If children need a hug, they get a hug. If they need to be told that they're loved, they're told that they're loved. If they need food, then there's food. All those fundamental basics in life, they get through the school. Many parents are struggling and parents are fully supported; they are seen as a very important part of the school community.

Other external people are as well. It's a school that opens their doors to anyone that they feel can offer something positive for the children within their community. Hence I am welcomed into the school. Other arts organisations in Stirling are welcomed into the school, too. There'll be environmental organisations working with the school, for example, as Lindsey and Shirley want the children to have as many opportunities as they possibly can because they might not get those at home. And they openly say the school can't do it by themselves. So partners are really, really important.

### ***Brave leadership***

I think what I've seen in the school, the component parts I think that are really important in Allan's are compassionate and creative leaders, a head teacher and a deputy head teacher, that in their own being are incredibly nurturing and incredibly loving, but also incredibly determined, and love children. And teachers who are seen as leaders in their own right by Lindsey and Shirley. They have a shared, clear vision and a vision that they feel is right for the children in their school. It is a vision they have researched around, so they're not just saying, this is right for being right's sake. And it isn't necessarily what is happening in other schools across Scotland.

So there's a lot of courage and a lot of braveness and a lot of resilience too. Allan's is a leading school in regards to developing creative approaches to learning. They're seeing the results in the children and young people that they work with and in their staff – they have a happy staff team who believe in and nurture Lindsey's and Shirley's hopes for the school.

Another example of an educator taking forward creative practice at Allan's Primary School is Katie, who is one of the lower school teachers. Katie comes from a nursery education background, she has forest schools training, so her practice is play and outdoors based. Her children learn through being curious about what they are seeing and hearing. They ask questions, and lots of them, and this is encouraged.

And there are many other teachers at Allan's with creative practice. You'll need to visit the classrooms.

I think key strengths at Allan's are they are a strong community of educators, a trusting team, and the children are sitting at the centre of that.

Just trying to think if there's anything else. Is there anything you want to ask me, Jane? From what I've said so far...

**Jane:** This is all really helpful! As you are talking, I am just reflecting back to things that Emma talked about for Orkney and some initial similarities and differences...I think largely where you have ended up is similar, yet how you got here was really different. For Emma and yes, for you, the things that I'm hearing initially is that it's about having the right people at the right time and it's about making the connections. It's also about a willingness to change, to take brave steps and to try something new without knowing the end point or destination. It is also about knowing, or feeling, that something is not quite right with how things are...the sense of 'there has to be more to it than this!'. It leads me to thinking of the Kotter model of change that talks about the first prompt to change being a sense of urgency. That something has to change because we can't tolerate the current situation anymore and that is springing to mind as we talk. It's like there is a need to look and find another sort of idea or way forward because there is a dissatisfaction with the status quo that is driving a change. So this feels like a connection or similarity between Allan's and Dounby. A dissatisfaction with the status quo.

On top of this and the notion of the right people meeting other right people at the right time, there is also a sense of real desire to do something different with a bravery almost to see what you think are the necessary ingredients, but to then allow what happens to happen and just see how things transpire. So that is what I am curious to look at with the schools; that this is what I am thinking in theory, but is this really what is happening on the ground? Are these really the things that are driving change?

As you speak, I am already thinking about how I structure the final report to be something real and practical for you. Something that helps other schools or places look at whether they ready, willing and able to embark on a creative learning venture. Almost like a place to start before you even embark on thinking about become a creative learning school. Here's some ready, willing and able...not even criteria as that feels like the wrong word...maybe rather indicators that say, actually we are ready, we are willing, and yes, we're able to actually venture in on this because it's not just a one week project, it's more than that.

### ***Space for conversation***

**Clare:** Ah yes, I would agree with the long term approach. I also think it's about knowing that it's change and what that really means for everyone. Change is difficult and challenging. I think for me, Lindsey and Shirley, having a safe space for conversation has been so important and also a space for being creative and trying things out. I regularly go into Allan's and Lindsey, Shirley and I will just sit and have a conversation and talk about their ideas, challenges or what they have been reading; and I chat about things that I have read or seen or heard. Things just emerge and flow as we trust in the process. We talk about the challenges we are coming across and we'll make changes, it's a long-term journey.

### ***Sitting with uncertainty***

It is really difficult when a school asks me what it will look like as I work with them. I cannot give a concrete, structured answer because so much depends on where they are at, how they want to engage and how open they are to change. Open mindedness, curiosity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication and creativity are key. The journey looks different for every school so it is difficult to explain what it might look like.

And that's why I think this research is really important.

**Jane:** So this is me thinking out loud again! I'm just wondering about changes we might see over time. What will shift because of the things that a school is able to change? Maybe it is hearing a shift in conversations from the question being what will this look like? To what will this feel like? Maybe it is about some of these shifts being about the ability to ask questions in a different way.

I am also brought back to you saying that the Maker Space was originally just a well-stocked art room. So we started with the environment. Yes, we started with the physical space, but actually it's a shift from physical to, I don't quite know what the word is, maybe metaphysical or behavioural, environment that is reflected in the types of questions we ask? Like what does it look like to what does it feel like?

### ***Five senses learning***

**Clare:** Yes! I've often spoken about five senses learning, which was something that Paul<sup>6</sup> and I used to speak about and it's something I speak to head teachers and teachers about when we have conversations about how do we help children feel learning? What does something feel like? What does something look like? What does something smell like? What does something taste like? It deepens children's interaction with the environment they are learning about and the concept of five senses learning can be used to help deepen children's perception of something, how they communicate about something, for example the weather, a room, a country. It can deepen their engagement with learning as they need to find out more about it to describe it through the senses. It's one way that you can make the thing that you're talking or learning about become physical and real and visceral.

It's something you can really take hold of, gives breadth and depth to learning and I feel that breadth and depth really engage children. At Allan's they are trying to make learning broad and deep and they've tried to make it multi-directional too. And for me, that's really, really key. That you kind of go back and forth, back and forth until you feel that you've understood something

**Jane:** I love that. I'm just thinking in my head almost, you know, could do a really simple infographic or diagram or something that talks about, okay, what are the differences I see in a creative learning school? Well actually learning, you've got one dimensional to three D, you've got, yes, it's how it looks to how it feels. It's one directional to actually random journeys, but you could use those simple things to be able to say to a school, if it goes well, what does creative learning actually look like? Okay, here you go. Here's some of the things that start to give you an insight into the philosophy. AND wherever I go in the school, these are the things I see and I feel and I hear and I notice.

### ***Connected learning***

**Clare:** I know. And it's how to ask those questions, and it's something I've grappled with over the years as I've spoken and thought about it. For me personally, the creative learning part of my job is one or two days a week and I just don't get as much time on it as I would like. Trying to create those infographics that you speak about to be able to share with schools, to be able to have a conversation with schools and say, 'okay, how do you think learning is happening in your class?'

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Gorman, Matthew Sowerby; Hidden Giants, educational innovators/creative practitioners – external change agents

Is it within that that three dimensional object or that one dimensional line? Are you heading in one direction? Is your learning constantly pushing forward? Or are you within this three dimensional object exploring broadly about a subject or topic? Sometimes one direction learning might be necessary, but I would argue that 3D learning is really important, where there is breadth, depth and width to learning, to deepen understanding and engagement, taking time somewhere and feeling comfortable with that, exploring connections, linking subjects and how they interact – project based learning.

There are so many pressures on schools. They need to keep moving forward to get everything done that needs to be achieved. And particularly as you get into the upper primary school years and then in secondary school, there are all these arrows (subjects), I think, heading forward alongside each other, but rarely linking in. So you'll have maths going on and then you'll have literacy going on and then you'll have social subjects going on and then you'll have science, and it'll all be going along in parallel, but not joining up anywhere, and links in what is being learnt will not be made between subjects.

What I've seen in the creative learning schools and in creative practice, the practice that Paul and Matthew<sup>1</sup> delivered, is that there's few straight lines and everything's crossing over and intermingling. Geography is linked in with maths, which is linked in with the science, which is linked in with social subjects. It creates a natural way of doing things because in the real world, things are not separate. It doesn't make sense to separate things off. For example if pupils are learning about climate change they can learn and respond to this through all subjects – science, geography, maths.

They can read environmental writers in English, have philosophical discussions, make a creative response in Art, write a protest song in music. I think that's certainly what I see in schools like Allan's that are taking creative approaches to learning. Learning is intermingled. They'll have occasions when they have that arrow, they have to, but other than that, their learning is a beautiful kind of intermingling. Also asking 'what do we need to know to be able to answer this question?' and they can then incorporate lots of different things depending on the pupils need. And that reflection has just been very helpful actually as I need to go back to a few schools and revisit initial conversations.

**Jane:** Yes! So I think that if I can, through this work, create or propose some really practical things building on your experiences and thoughts, then that could really support you in accelerating change. I think I have definitely sensed from you and Emma is that what really prompts change is a dissatisfaction with how things are at the base level. Yet it is so much more than that. I know there's more to this as just now I can't remember exact words you used, but I think it was something around being sure that 'it's so much more than this'.

I hear that you and Lindsey connected over a desire to act, a belief that creative learning was 'so much more than this'. So if you could understand those things from a school's perspective and know what it looks and feel like at every step along the way, you can give another school a really strong foundation from which to build. You can help them see that even before they decide to invest in and think about adopting a creative learning approach, here's some of the things that actually need to be in place for this to be really impactful. That it's not about a toolkit and 'doing stuff', rather it is about a desire, a belief that learning is so much more than this. A belief that it can be different, a desire to challenge, a willingness to be brave and to know that you will go into meetings and it will feel lonely and to say, actually you need to be ready for all these things.

### ***Being brave – a lone voice***

**Clare:** Yes. And Lindsey now feels braver if she goes into meetings as a lone voice because this is right for their children, and actually this is what matters to her and her school community. And actually it's being noticed now. There are now awards coming in for Allan's Primary School that are directly related to placing children at the centre of learning and developing learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including a Rights Respecting School Award and a Skills for Future Pathways Award. And Lindsey and Shirley feel that what they are developing is right for their children, and for the school community.

**Jane:** That's really helpful. Thank you. What it gives me is that framework to go into the conversations with schools and just to say, so here's some of the things that I'm really curious about and I'm really interested to know more about. I will be asking them to tell me their story, but I can frame it to around themes I am already starting to create in my head based on our conversation, which may or may not continue to be themes once I've been to the schools.

### ***Empowering others; nurturing seeds***

**Clare:** Yes. Yes, yes, absolutely. I think, do you know what? I think a key for Emma and I, I think our role in all of this is a bit of a coaching and mentoring role. It's not about providing the answers, rather about us already being interested and wanting to be enabling. So Lindsey was already interested and my role was just about enabling Lindsey to have that space, to have that conversation and to just listen. Emma did the same for Dounby and we could feed in some opportunities or ideas because both Allan's and Dounby had creative practitioners and educators already working with them. So it's given opportunity for teachers to see the practice of somebody that has a creative approach and uses creative process to work with children. So working with Paul<sup>7</sup>, who worked in and out of Allan's for quite a few years, was in a very similar sense, a mentoring role, working with Lindsey and Shirley and having lots of conversations.

And they loved Paul and was upset when he brought Hidden Giants to a close. Also Paul Collard from Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE). Paul and Paul were working together and Allan's became the focus school in Stirling. I suppose, actually, in a sense, with both Paul's moving onto other things so no longer able to work with Allan's Primary School, it kind of allowed Lindsey, Shirley and myself in a sense, but more so Lindsey and Shirley to see that strong foundations had been built and to just think, okay, so where am I now going to take this? So in a sense it's given them the space to really nurture and grow the seeds that had been planted - that's the term I always love to use!

They planted lots of seeds and now Lindsey and Shirley are nurturing those and growing those alongside their team. In a sense, if Paul was still involved, I'm not quite sure it would've grown as it is because we might have relied on Paul too much. So actually now that space has been created to allow things to grow and I think that's been key. I suppose you'll notice from the work that you do, it's knowing when to stop that coaching and mentoring, isn't it? It's knowing when to say to somebody, okay, I think you can just go with this now. And you just get in touch with me when you need me, when you want to have a chat. Thomas now leads makerspace. He doesn't need any input to that. So when do Emma and I let go? And I think that happens naturally, but it is important to recognise that, yes, that was just in what we were speaking about together there, that just made me think of that process of that coaching, mentoring and just stepping back.

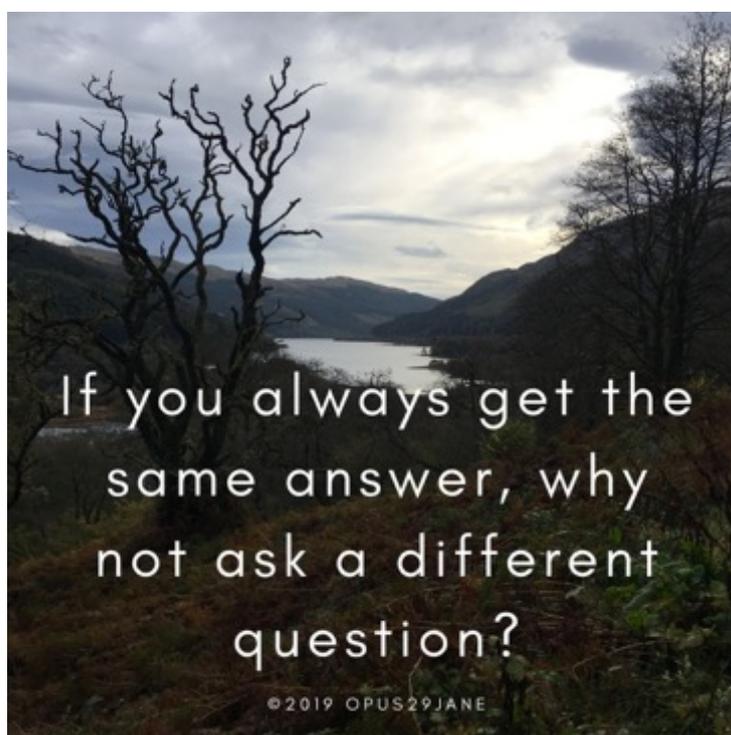
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<sup>7</sup> Paul Gorman, Matthew Sowerby; Hidden Giants, educational innovators/creative practitioners – external change agents

**Jane:** What I am hearing, then, is that's what is really important is a sense of ownership and accountability for change. Maybe it's the same as with young people in terms of the design thinking approach, in that it's a teachers relinquishing power, for want of a better word, and control that really allows learning to occur. And that this is the same sort of thing. It's like your role is to set things up and then stand back as off they go. If you use that analogy, a design thinking process, you've got four groups in the same class on the same challenge or looking at totally different things, so you and Emma could have four different schools all looking at Maker Space, design thinking, creative learning, but they're all going to look different.

**Clare:** Yes, I mean, I was working with another Primary School for a while who were, and are, developing creative approaches to learning. Hidden Giants were working with them and yes, the approach to creative learning in that school is very different. That's the beauty of creative approaches to learning – it is individual to each school, to each teacher. Some teachers love working alongside the creative practitioners we bring in to work with them initially, and some teachers struggle with the more open, creative, often meandering approach to learning. But we have also needed to learn that we sometimes need to take very small and gentle steps as change is difficult and not everyone feels that it is the right change, and that is okay. There are many different possible approaches to learning.

A common factor that I see in a creative leader, whether that is a Headteacher or a class teacher is their willingness to listen, to see that 'there must be more than this' and their brave leadership in times of challenge.



## **LINDSEY HOWLAND, HEAD TEACHER; SHIRLEY TOOLE, DEPUTE HEAD – ALLAN’S PRIMARY SCHOOL, STIRLING**

**Jane:** What I want to be able to do in whatever I create at the end of this project is to be able to say, in this particular case, in this particular example, here's the things that felt really critical to enabling this school to provide the type of environment, to create the environment that these young people are experiencing every day. Your story is a big part of the jigsaw in helping me understand, so tell me your story, please!

### ***Building our ethos***

**Lindsey:** Okay. I think for me, the first thing when I came to Allan's was I needed to look at the ethos. I wanted it to embrace all of our community and I felt we really needed to open our doors and say, this is who we are, and be proud of who we are and be transparent. Being transparent felt really important so we could start building these trusting relationships, be present and be a feature outside so that parents know who you are so people can start talking to you, so you can start to build these relationships. My first day, the children would line up outside and I went out to meet them and say, good morning to the whole school. I didn't realise at that point how pivotal that was because it set the scene from the very beginning.

We needed to work really hard on our ethos to bring it to life. For example, I wanted an open door policy where children would come into the office and feel relaxed. I always remember the first time that I called for some children to come and see me; I went into class and asked for them to come in and I said, 'could you come with me?' Their faces were faces of dread, and it was like, 'oh my goodness, we are in trouble'. But it was the opposite because I said, no, we all need to get used to this. This is about us working together and I need your help and I need you to come down to the office because we're going to do something fun together. So it was changing that whole mindset that we were all learning together and we were all in it together.

That's when the curriculum rationale was born. It was born out of, this is who we are, we've got a vision together, the community, the staff, the children, and the leadership. We've all got this vision together, and we're going to work really hard at creating this vision to make sure that our children leave Allan's Primary School as confident individuals with the four capacities and ready to embrace 21st century living. That was the start of our journey and amongst all that, looking at 21st century skills was really important to me because my Primary 1s at the time were going to be going into jobs that didn't even exist. And I thought, is our curriculum actually equipped for this? I kept looking at it thinking, no, because it's one, overcrowded, and two, because it's overcrowded, we're not giving enough depth to things, and we are doing a lot of...we're spreading ourselves too thin.

### ***5Cs and Maker Space***

How, then, do we hone in on what's really essential to our children? That's where the 5Cs were born. And the 5Cs go from nursery right through to senior phase, from my nursery to Allan's Primary, through Allan's Primary and then on to our feeder high schools in Stirling. Then we were looking for a platform to really launch and enable the 5Cs to develop, which is when Maker Space emerged. That was through collaboration from colleagues across in New York and with research from lots of different areas.

So the 5Cs were born and Maker Space came into being, but to enable Maker Space to work exceptionally well, we used a platform called the Design Thinking Toolkit, which allowed the children to go through a process using the 5Cs to really progress and develop the skills that are required using the platform of Maker Space.

Coupled with the design thinking tool, using the progression of 5Cs, it just started to become embedded in the school and that felt really important. Throughout that time, we were still working on our ethos in the school and we were looking at nurture and really embedding children's agency within that as well. Basically making sure that children had a voice and looking for ways to really encourage that voice and that agency. Then we started putting our toe in the water to do early play pedagogy in the Primary 1 class and we did one year of that, which was quite successful. Then we went into year two, and then we went into lockdown. It was terrible for a community, but I think we came out of lockdown possibly even stronger than when we went in because we decided to be proactive.

### ***Making lemonade from lemons***

We knew it was a horrendous situation that we were all in, but we thought 'we've been given lemons, let's make lemonade out of it'. Let's not sit back and mope, let's be proactive. So it was knocking on doors, it was really connecting with the community. We became Blue Peter presenters. Every Friday I would do an assembly, and this is in the first lockdown, not the second. Parents and children couldn't wait for the Friday assembly. I'd been up to three o'clock in the morning uploading it all onto YouTube, and they all sat there and it was the highlight of their week, absolutely the highlight of the week. As staff we really pushed ourselves out there and showed confidence that we were going to get through there. I was doing videos in my living room, my kitchen out on the deck when the weather was lovely.

### ***Creating community***

But it was that connection; it was that connection that mattered; that made the difference. Parents would email in and say, 'Mrs. Howland, thank you so much for doing this. We're so appreciative'. We were out delivering school meals. We were out giving learning packs. So that really kept us connected and when we did come back, there was this strong feeling of we are going to get through this and we're going to get through it together and we're going to battle on. So even though it was a terrible time, I believe that we came out even stronger than we went in. But throughout that time, we knew that transition back to school was going to be difficult for some of our learners and for some of our parents and for some of our staff. When we came back we decided to use a 3C principle to help, and it was about **C**ohesion, **C**onnection and **C**almness.

We used that approach to really bring our school community back and it really worked. The communication, that connectedness was really important to get that cohesion. I would do Frequently Asked Questions for the parents. I would do Frequently Asked Questions for the staff, the children. We were making videos up about when you come back, this is the door that you're going to come in. So there was nothing unexpected for the children. Every stone had been turned over as in what might they think? That was really important as well.

## ***A trauma informed approach***

I realised then that nurture was one thing, but we'd all been through some kind of trauma. So we decided to look at a trauma informed approach rather than just nurturing principles. We wanted to dig down into the brain. We wanted to talk about how we were going to interact with our children. So we use a method called PACE in school, which means that our interactions with our children and our parents and staff are **P**layful, we show **A**cceptance. We say to our children, I can see that you are very angry just now right away the children's, children's shoulders go right down. We then have the 'C' which stands for **C**urious; wonder why? Then **E**mpathy as well. These playful interactions that we have with our community and our children are really what we base everything on, and that's when our values are really at the heart of everything we do, it is in these interactions.

We worked on the trauma informed approach, and that has been pivotal. I think what was pivotal for us was when I started here, we all were armed with walkie talkies - and I used the word 'armed' with walkie talkies. Within 10 minutes of my being here, my first day as head teacher, I got a call to go to primary where the children were throwing chairs and showing really dysregulated behaviour since coming out of lockdown. We don't have a walkie-talkie in the school now because we don't need it. We don't need it for two reasons. Our children are, in the main, regulated, and if they know and if they aren't regulated, our staff feel empowered and they know exactly how to manage their behaviour. It becomes...it's an empowering system.

*(Shirley, Depute Head enters the room)*

**Lindsey:** We are just recording!

**Shirley:** Oh I am so sorry!

**Jane:** It's fine. Honestly, it's fine. I'm recording to help me remember what we talked about and means I don't have to scribble everything and I've got a record of our conversation.

**Shirley:** I managed to do the same when Lindsey was being filmed for Education Scotland and coming in and just being 'hello?' Like we always do. And she was sitting there, speaking. She does those things incredibly well, Jane, because just speaking to her and she just knows her school inside out and the way that she's brought us on this journey to me is amazing. Oh, thank you for that - she doesn't let us say that enough.

**Jane:** Well, that's on record now, so. Well,

**Shirley:** It's on tape, you quote me. Yeah. Fabulous. Thank you.

**Lindsey:** Yeah, so I'm just talking about a trauma-informed journey and saying, what was pivotal is the actual, from my first day here to where we are just now, it's that empowered staff, staff feeling empowered to manage behaviour. They understand the behaviour, and they know that there's something at the seat of it, because behaviour is communication. The children are all communicating through that behaviour. Why am I distressed? And it's now trying to label that with the children and say, well, could it be? I wonder? Playful interactions are so important, and coupled with that, children's rights are now embedded in Scot's law, and I'm really passionate about children being change makers of their society. The only way they're going to do that is by having their rights fulfilled from a baby, because we have got the infant pledge now, which is amazing to see from a baby right through to their senior phase.

So we've been on that children's rights journey as well. We've just, I'll be able to tell you because by the time this goes out, we've just got our gold award from Rights Respecting Scotland, that happened on Monday, and we're the first school in Stirling to get the gold. The first school in Stirling to get our silver actually, and now we've got our gold, and we did that within a year, well, not even a year, we did it in September - got our silver. Then the man that assessed us was so impressed with us that he told us to go for gold and do it quickly, and to put in for the May because he said, you only need to do X, Y, and Z, and you've got it.

### ***We've got this***

It was totally because staff were like, I actually had, I don't know, if I said this to you. I had a member of staff say to me, 'oh, are we really that gold standard?' And I think they were thinking about how much time they're maybe speaking about or teaching the rights, but when they looked at the evidence, that person had a look at the PowerPoint and what we were going to present, just to kind of check it was interwoven through absolutely all of that stuff. So yes, we were, and it was with Bells on. So yeah, it was kind of reassuring that we do it instinctively and it's just interwoven through what we are doing. Sometimes it's like all I need to say is 'we, we've got this'. Yeah, we've got this.

**Shirley:** I know it was just a small thing, but that shows that you're believing in them. Yeah. Because you say they don't need to do that. That they've got this. They can do it.

**Jane:** I think one of the things that I am reflecting on, is that creative learning isn't about there being no boundaries or there being total freedom. There is freedom, but bound, it feels like it's bounded freedom because that maybe brings the respect value in and helps develop a kind of acceptance and respect that these are the things that are the givens almost. So for that young boy, yes, that child is having a really tough time, but actually it's still not okay that you just wander around wherever you want. There's a guide, there's boundaries, there's structure and actually for young people, they actually, well, all of us, we need that. We need boundaries. We need that. That's okay. And that's not okay, and this makes children feel safe as well.

### ***Respecting children's rights***

**Lindsey:** Exactly, doesn't it? Yeah. Our role is to make that framework that's going to help them feel safe at school. It's a metaphorical kind of arms around you safe.

So being trauma informed and with the children's rights, and as I said, that now having our gold standard, the important thing is that it is actually interwoven into the fabric of everything that we do. It's like when I see I've got this thing about a nurture room. Oh, you go to be nurtured in a nurtured room! That nurture room should never exist because nurture should permeate throughout the whole environment. It shouldn't be called a nurture room. And actually it's like children's rights. You shouldn't say, all right, we're going to do, right? We're doing it right now.

**Jane:** We're going to do equality and diversity. We're going to be quite inclusive today.

**Lindsey:** Exactly. Do you know, yeah. A segmented way of thinking around how does that fit into my timetable or whatever. But I think that person was reassured when they looked at it. Oh, it's all of those things. And I was like, yes it is. All of what we already do. I think it's what some, and I think that's almost, if you flip that, you kind of go, for me that's like, well, it's not a tick box because actually it's just what it is. Just what we do. That's it. And we happen to meet a standard because of what we do, rather than here's what we need to do to meet a standard, therefore we need to do these things because we believe in them. That's the strength in it, that it's not a tick box.

**Shirley:** Actually we do these things. I know, because those kind of right to respect in schools, it's like it's a really thorough, so robust. I mean, it was what, 10 pages of evidence around thinking and reflection and things? And I think maybe if staff have not realised, they've been part of it, but that's the beauty. It's that bigger picture view of what we do instinctively, that they've got an understanding of their part in that. But yeah, it's really robust. And we're not awards and awards, but they are, it's really, really given us the structure for progress and it gives us focus. The programmes are great, too, as they help us share our progress outwardly. Even if their banner is too big to go on our fence! Apparently they just assume that all schools have the same amount of space!

### ***Curriculum of Hope***

**Lindsey:** So coupled with the trauma informed approach and the children's rights, alongside the early pedagogy and play and outdoor learning that started when we came out of lockdown because they weren't advocating outdoor learning for the whole transmission phase of COVID and whatnot. That's when our creativity was really born and Katie took that on board and really ran with it. We were doing presentations to the regional improvement collaborative. We've done work with the Scottish Learning Festival and we've had visitor upon visitor in to see our outdoor learning and our early pedagogy. All that then feeds into who we are as Allan's.

Then to top it off is the Curriculum of Hope, which is the next thing, because I love Debra Kidds' work and she talks about a curriculum not only rich in knowledge, but in humanity. That is what we are trying to instil in our children so that we make them these equipped learners ready to embrace the challenges of 21st century learning, but with compassion and empathy so that they're emotionally intelligent and they can thrive in society. And they can always look back and say, Allan's primary school really set me on my way to that.

**Shirley:** As they go on to high school, which we saw a bunch of them going out for this morning, we've got seven different places they are going off to, they're scattered to the wind this year. They're going to seven different secondary schools, but the high school always tell us that you can spot an Allan's pupil. That feels really important.

**Jane:** The last thing I'm curious about is what it is that's enabled you to be doing the job that you're doing? What enabled you to come in and not just repeat what had gone before, reinforcing that this is what a school looks like, this is how we do it, this is the curriculum, this is what we embed? What enabled you to kind of come in and go, actually we're going to do it differently?

## **Courage**

**Lindsey:** Courage. Huge courage and being bold is very, very important. As is having the buy-in of your team, that is really, really important and is about empowering your team. I was able to appoint Shirley as well. So I was able to recruit Shirley, which is amazing. I didn't inherit a depute, so I was looking for a depute that I just knew instinctively would work alongside me and would get me and my vision.

I did know the school from before, well, I was here for four years before, so it was like coming home and I did know it, but it was like 20 years ago. Then before that I had been depute because I'd been a really young depute here. I was 28 when I was depute head, and then I left and had my family, and then I came back to Allan's, but I didn't come back here straight away. So when things are down, it's easier, I believe, it's easier to actually make changes in a way because things are so low that anything that you do, there's a wee bit of hope there.

## **Relationships first, last, everything**

I think for me, it was the fact that I came in, I watched, didn't change things to start off with, and I didn't put pressure on the staff. I said to them we're going to work on ethos. That's what we're going to work on. We're going to work on ethos, we're going to work on community, we're going to open the doors, we're going to get the parents in, and we're going to build relationships. So for the first six months, it was all about relationship building.

**Shirley:** It's that taking people with you kind of thing. And you do that incredibly well. You take people and try to get everybody motivated and aligned. You are never going to get everybody supported all the time, but that's all part of the process.

**Jane:** What I am hearing as you talk is that you came in, you watched a lot, you took pressure off staff, you built relationships. What I am wondering is what's been your curriculum that's given you that knowledge and experience because you know that that's a different approach? It's not a 'come in and assert my authority', it's a 'come in and listen'. So where have you got your skills from to enable you to take that approach, which is then cascaded out to others.

## **Living values**

**Lindsey:** Yeah, I know. Yeah, I think that's been on my journey. Where has it come from? I've had a vast experience of teaching and I've taught in lots of different schools and really tough schools, but had amazing relationships with the children and the parents. I think for me it's the fact, and I said to you at the very beginning, it's about children's wellbeing to start off with and if you get children's wellbeing right, everything else follows. So for me, that's always been the way that I've done any learning and teaching with my ethos in my classroom. That is where it all centres from. Having time out of school and putting a business hat on and being in business was really illuminating for me to see how banks operate. And you've come from that background as well, Shirley. I went out of teaching, grew a business. I started a business with my husband and then came back into education.

For me, it was the fact that it's saying, right, this is a new curriculum that we've been given this curriculum for excellence. Let's look at this and say, right, we are getting flexibility. We still need to do our maths and our literacy. We need to still do that really, really well, but let's see how we can create a really creative curriculum that runs alongside that and give our children the agency and the empowerment that they need. And that's where it came from. So that is really the experience of 5 to 14, looking at this new one and building all that in together, but having the courage to sit back and sit and say, I disagree with that and here's my rationale for it. Sometimes I feel like I'm a lonely person at meetings.

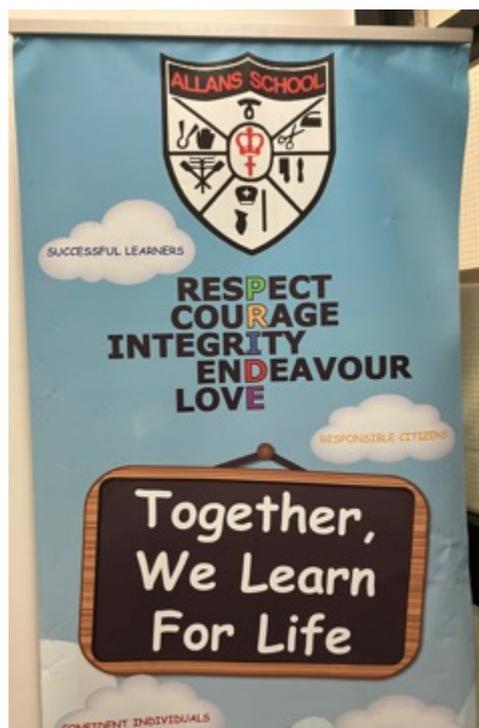
**Shirley:** You're a courageous conversation type of person. And all of that's built on that you are a values based leader and not all leaders are values based. So that's why it comes from those core things, leading by example.

**Lindsey:** Yes, values based. You can't deviate from who you are. You've got to stay strong to your values and belief system. And sometimes you've got to close your mouth politically and keep schtum, but always at the heart of it. It's all about children and being passionate about them at the heart of it, and it's not for self-gain.

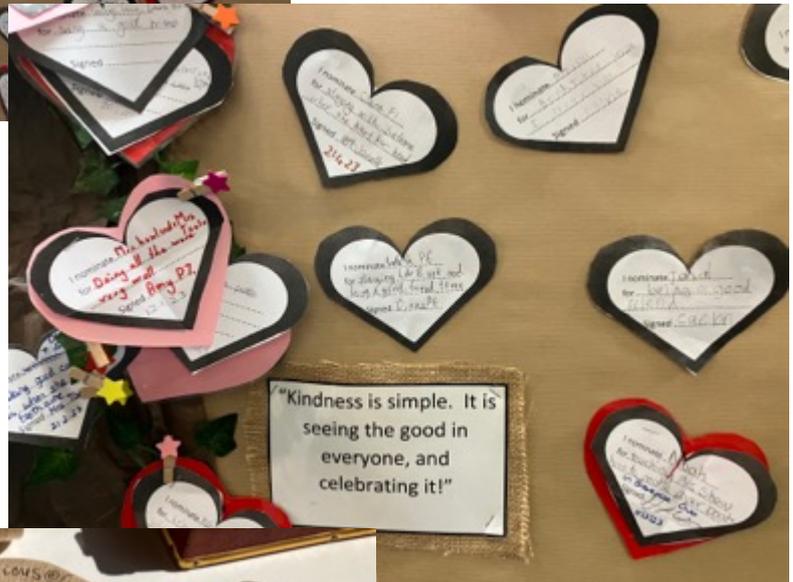


# ALLAN'S IN PICTURES

Together, we learn for life



# Kindness at the heart



# The 5 Cs



Wellbeing



Creative spaces



**PART THREE:**

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY,  
REFLECTIONS AND  
THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

## **PART THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, REFLECTIONS & THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the research paradigm and methodology adopted for this research. It is important to offer this prior to presenting the reflections and thematic analysis to provide a clear foundation for the research and to build reader understanding as to how, why and where the latter ideas and outputs have been constructed and created.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### ***1.0 Research Paradigm – a constructivist-interpretivist approach***

A research paradigm can be simply described as a ‘set of rules and regulations’ that establish or define boundaries and provide guidance on how to behave successfully inside such boundaries (Barker, 1992, p.32). The ontological and epistemological beliefs of a researcher influence the type of questions a researcher asks, the approaches they adopt to pursue a particular project, and the framework (or paradigm) within which a piece of research is positioned. Thus, understanding that the way in which the researcher views the world, shapes and influences the paradigm within which a particular study is conducted is an important part of any research process. There are many ways to answer the ontological and epistemological questions necessary in developing an appropriate research paradigm. This means that there are never any ‘right or wrong’ answers to such questions or any way to prove or disprove any particular paradigm, as fundamentally they are ‘human constructs’. Making appropriate methodological choices based on the identified research paradigm does, however, provide confidence and validity for the qualitative researcher.

A constructivist approach assumes a ‘relativist ontology’ that perceives multiple realities, and a subjectivist epistemology where the ‘knower’ and the ‘respondent’ co-create understandings and a ‘naturalistic’ methodology that exists in the ‘real world’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.13). Constructivism stems from a belief that there are multiple possibilities within every context, (Gratton and Jones, 2004) and acknowledges that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. The constructivist researcher adopts methodological processes that aim to understand knowledge and experience within the relevant setting. Constructivists seek to develop authentic and credible ‘reconstructed understandings of the social world’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.92). Importantly, researchers operating within a constructivist paradigm appreciate that there may be multiple interpretations of any single experience (the relativist ontology) and therefore understand that broad and sweeping generalisations cannot be made from their findings.

A constructivist researcher employs an interpretive methodology to explore their particular area of interest. Using appropriate methods, a constructivist-interpretive researcher attempts to uncover meanings, values and explanations from their studies. They seek to understand emotions, feelings and experiences from the ‘inside’ in order to make sense of situations or studies. The role of the interpretive researcher is not ‘merely to celebrate the story or narrative’ (Gabriel, 2008, p.165), but rather to reflect upon experiences in order to establish a real understanding of the issues, problems and outcomes of a situation or context. Elliot (2005 p.18 and p.19) noted that constructivist researchers seek primarily to understand ‘how a sense of social order is created through talk and interaction’ (ibid., p.18).

## **2.0 Why does this matter?**

Adopting a constructivist-interpretive paradigm for this research effectively reflected the human nature of the work within the schools involved in this partnership. Such an approach better acknowledged that every individual within the programme had a story to tell and that these stories differed depending on personal experience, perception and world view. By recognising that everyone had their own experience, which may or may not be in line with expected programme outcomes, this research and researcher was in a better position to develop authentic and credible 'reconstructed understandings of the social world' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.92) in order to generate greater insights into the emotions, feelings and experiences from leaders and other key stakeholders within the Creative Learning Networks.

For the reader, this approach may feel challenging to begin with as it shifts the relative 'power' base within the researcher-participant relationship. Rather than assuming certain qualitative outcomes will always be present in an individual journey (a more positivist paradigm), a constructivist-interpretive approach provides a frame within which participant stories can be heard, co-constructed and communicated in a meaningful, rigorous and valid manner. In the long-term this will enable Stirling and Orkney Councils to more effectively tell the stories of those involved and allow their unique participant voices to be heard, shared and valued. In turn, this has contributed to a more impactful change narrative from which future schools and network partners can learn.

## **3.0 A narrative approach**

Given the key aim for this piece of research, (to better understand the leadership required to create and sustain change within a school adopting a Creative Learning philosophy), it was appropriate to suggest that the major data sources are the core personnel from within each school, or whom had played a key role in initiating the respective changes. The research approach adopted for this project was therefore based on a perceived need to map and analyse participants journeys across and through the change process, where participants are considered to be relevant head teachers, senior leaders, other teachers and also pupils. There was also a need to be able to compare and contrast each story and to ultimately communicate and explain relevant findings to other schools considering a creative learning approach (key research aim).

The value of narrative as a methodological approach has been widely recognised across a range of subjects and professions. Green (2013, p.62) argued that 'narratives have always been a path to knowledge', whilst Donnelly *et al* (2013, p.6) highlighted that 'there is much to learn from our tales of the field' and recognised the great value in sharing experiences and stories or 'real-life'. Crucially, there is a strong argument from authors such as Green and Donnelly that if developed through a reflexive and critical stance, stories can be presented in meaningful ways that enable readers to engage with them as well as learn from them.

This latter point felt particularly important for this piece of research as, done well, a narrative methodology will not only provide valuable insight that can be utilised to bring to life the impact demonstrated through quantitative data; it also provides an engaging means of communicating such impact on a very human level to future schools, key stakeholders and funders.

#### **4.0 Key Research Questions**

Using the overarching research aims as a guide, the following was adopted as the key research questions (KRQ):

1. What has enabled change to happen in schools such as Allan's Primary School (Stirling) and Dounby Primary School (Orkney)?

In addition, these were identified as supporting, or sub-research questions:

- What have the changes been within the school culture and way of working?
- Who has led/driven those changes?
- What has the journey been?
- Who has been influenced by changes within the schools?
- How have teachers and pupils experienced the changes?

The KRQ and sub-questions informed the interview approaches for each research participant and when reflecting back to the stories in parts one and two of this book (research report), the reader will be able to begin to identify their own answers to these questions. These questions will be revisited throughout the remainder of this report, and whilst there may not be overt and obvious direct answers to each, the ideas and outputs in the final part of this book are clearly informed by and constructed as an applied response to each question.

#### **5.0 Research framework**

The structure for this qualitative, narrative research followed the summary proposed by Flick (2013, p.5-6) in highlighting three overarching aims of any qualitative data analysis:

1. Describe a phenomenon in some or greater detail;
2. Compare several cases on what they have in common or on the differences between them;
3. Develop a theory of the phenomenon under study from the analysis of empirical material

For this piece of research, this specifically means:

1. A collection of individual participant narratives from key personnel within the two schools adopting the Creative Learning change process (parts one and two);
2. An overall 'cross-case' (thematic) analysis piece identifying the commonalities and/or differences between the two schools experiences of change (part three);
3. A tentative and grounded model or approach to understanding and informing future development of Creative Learning Network schools in Stirling and Orkney (part four).

#### **6.0 Research plan**

In developing the detail of the research plan, a combination of Creswell's (2015, p.516) seven steps to 'doing narrative research' and the six-step approach to reflexive thematic analysis offered by Braun and Clarke (2006) were considered and applied. The table on the following page summarises what happened at each phase in the research process and describes the process of achieving the three research outputs identified in section 5.0 above.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>What?</b>	<b>How?</b>
<b>1</b>	<i>Context/ data familiarisation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desk based review of all plans, insight, information and historical data from CLN network and Allan's/Dounby Schools</li> <li>• Conversations/interviews with CLN leads for Stirling/Orkney</li> <li>• Agree research tools</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<i>Identify research participants</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From discussions with CLN leads, identify key individuals within Allan's and Dounby Schools</li> <li>• Connect with and invite prospective research participants</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<i>Gather data (collect the stories)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect narrative data from research participants as agreed – face-to-face and/or online interviews</li> <li>• This will include life history style interviews, history grids, pupil videos/testimonies as agreed</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<i>Analyse and synthesise the collective case studies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse individual participant data to identify key themes/contrasts</li> <li>• Analyse/review the collective case studies for Allan's and Dounby separately</li> <li>• Create unique narratives of change for Allan's and Dounby schools that answer the 'what happened?' question</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<i>Cross-case analysis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare/contrast the resulting change narratives from Allan's and Dounby Schools</li> <li>• Define and name developed themes from the narratives</li> <li>• Present a cross-case summary that depicts the commonalities and contrasts in respective change journeys from each school</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<i>Produce the report</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a final report identifying prevalent themes and making recommendations for future development of CLN schools.</li> </ul>

## RESEARCH REFLECTIONS

The following paragraphs offer an insight into my researcher reflections from my visits to both Allan's and Dounby Primary Schools. These reflective notes are raw, unfiltered and unedited and are presented as transcripts of my immediate voice note reflections on leaving each school. It feels important to include these to 'triangulate' the research by including a researcher voice and perspective of experiencing each school.

A key question in my head during my visits to each of the two schools was 'does my experience here match what I have heard from others?'. I essentially wanted to discover whether the reality of the school aligned with my expectations. Would I actually feel what I expected to feel, having heard the stories of the change that each school had implemented?

The paragraphs below are included in date order of the school visits.

## ***LEAVING ALLAN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL***

***Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2023***

“As I am driving away from Allan's Primary School, I have so many thoughts in my head - random stuff – and I don't want to lose it. This feels really weird, recording reflective notes, but anyway, I'll go for it as I want to keep hold of some of these things.

In no particular order, things that struck me were the feeling of the school. I felt really welcomed when I walked in. I was welcomed the moment I walked in there. I was met by the deputy head teacher and just felt welcome and I can't put it in any other words than that. I was greeted with a smile. Kids seemed happy and everybody I met, it felt like a really happy place to be.

Lindsey talked a lot about the space and the environment that was created for the students, the children, and I think I felt that. It's really hard, actually. It's really hard to put into words. It just felt like a good place to be. It felt safe, it felt welcoming, it felt friendly. When I walked into the classes, I noticed the children looked happy. In the curious spaces, there was noise, there was a buzz. I could hear PE going on, and there was kind of the sound of content. Happy children.

It was almost sometimes...it was hard to see where the teacher was when you walked in, and that felt quite, that actually feels quite a key reflection maybe, because so often the teacher's at the front of the class, and that's where you find the teacher talking to children. One of the teachers, Thomas, I can't remember his surname, he was kind of stood up surrounded by children. In other classes, teachers were sitting down with the children. In some spaces, the teachers weren't in the space, and it felt like the children were trusted.

The environment – as I was looking around different spaces, the lighting felt really important, so some spaces were really bright. Others where they were quieter, the light, it was a slightly darker space, maybe calmer lighting and the things that were in there felt calmer, smoother, peaceful.

I noticed the word love a lot.

The values were in a lot of places and not just kind of values on the wall. There were ways that the values were brought to life. Through posters, through the displays, all that sort of stuff. Children were curious about me. They looked and they were kind of like, oh, a visitor. They waved at me.

They weren't afraid to acknowledge that I was there and to speak and to talk and to embrace the fact that they had teachers walking around with a random stranger who they'd never met yet they were quite happy to say hi. It felt like confidence, but also it felt like the children were proud of their space, their work.

It was really obvious that the things that Lindsey talks about were in practice everywhere, and I felt like consistently, it wasn't like I walked into one classroom and went, oh, this is a creative learning classroom, but the others aren't. It felt like the whole school was working together and it felt joined up, so the space flowed. There was a kind of consistency with what I saw everywhere. Loved being there. Yeah, that's it for now. Those are some key things.”

## **LEAVING DOUNBY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

*Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2023*

“I’m just leaving Dounby and actually feel a little bit sad to leave! I was invited to stay for the Mediaeval Banquet but I just couldn’t stay any longer as my husband was waiting for me to continue our holiday! I would have loved to have stayed and seen what transpired as I suspect there would be a lot of fun, energy and laughter. I don’t entirely know where to start recording these notes...it feels hard to capture the feeling of being in Dounby in words, as I am definitely leaving with a warm feeling.

Maybe I start with the children and how I experienced them. They were so brilliant. The group that took me round blew me away with their knowledge and their chat, but it’s more than that. I felt like they were proud to show me round and to show me their school. Also to share their learning and everything about the school. What I think I noticed most was their confidence in talking to me. A random strange adult showing up in their school to be shown around, and yet they met me without fear. They just jumped right in and chatted to me. Asked me what I wanted to see and listened to my questions. They eagerly shared their stories and seemed happy to be with me...maybe they were happy to have got out of class?! No. I actually don’t think that.

I was struck by how the group that showed me round worked together, too. They all included each other. All had something to say. Listened to each other. Asked each other questions about where they should go next – asked me what I wanted to see. I liked seeing the interaction and connection they had with each other.

I loved chatting with the group too, about their work. The Gruesome Girls were so smart and sassy and articulate. Quick witted and again, seemingly comfortable in the company of a random adult recording their conversation. I loved it. We need more of these confident, comfortable, curious, funny, kind young people in the world.

The welcome struck me, too. Like Allan’s I was met warmly and there was a general ‘buzz’. Chatter everywhere – the playground, the classrooms, the staff room. Everywhere. It felt like a good place to be. Classrooms were noisy places, not silent and scary. The children said ‘hi’ and were willing to answer questions and show me what they were doing. Also to ask me questions and answer mine – however random they were! And to show me what they had been doing. I was amazed at the depth in which they could talk about stuff that I know nothing about!

Wellbeing was everywhere. On the walls, yes, and in learning intentions written out. I also feel like I could sense it. I felt like people were thriving and happy. I saw hugs. I saw children caring for each other – like when one group came and said they had lost their script for their play. I saw other children check in with them and see if they could help. The calm space was brilliant too – and that the children knew what it was there for and that they could use it if they needed.

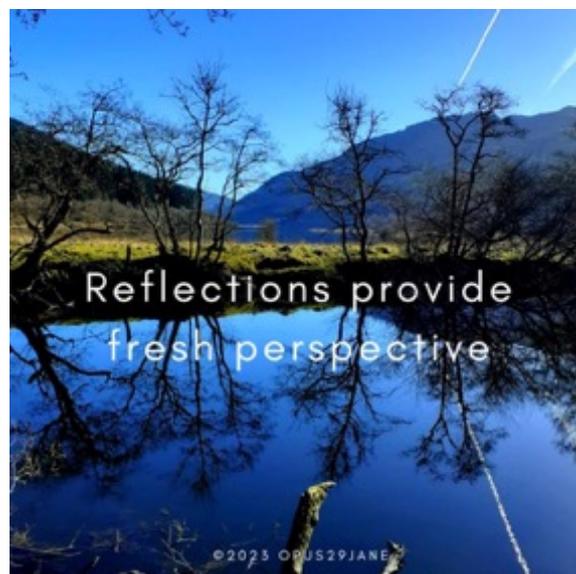
I noticed that Islean almost took a back seat during my visit. She met me and we chatted, then she pretty much handed it over to other staff and children. She trusted her team and children to tell me and show me what I needed to know. That felt significant - reflected what I’d heard her talk about previously. She allowed the school and children to do the talking. To walk the talk.

I finish where I started. I was sad to leave. I wanted to stay more and hear more and see more. It was a great place to be. I wonder if that is how the children feel? I wonder if I got a small dose of the Dounby Way? I leave with confidence that what I have heard and read, is what I feel when I am in the school. Brilliant place.”

## ***ON THINKING FURTHER***

Having visited both schools and spent time contemplating what I saw and experienced, I offer six key reflections that, to me, stand out as I think about my experiences of Allan's and Dounby Primary Schools.

1. Confident, energetic, happy children who are ready, willing and able to talk in detail, and with enthusiasm, about their school, their learning and their experiences
2. Love and care are openly demonstrated. By everyone. Everywhere. Children's wellbeing and happiness are at the forefront of decisions, planning and actions. Investing in wellbeing first is not at the expense of attainment...in fact, attainment arguably increases when you put children's wellbeing first and at the heart of a school. This love and care extends beyond the school walls and into families and the community. Everyone feels valued as a result.
3. Talk is walked. Values are lived and seen, felt, heard in action. Yes, they are written on the wall and in documents, yet more importantly, they are incredibly visible and visceral. You sense them everywhere and believe that they matter and shape everything.
4. Curiosity drives learning. There is a recognition that learning happens when topics are relevant, interesting and learner 'owned'. Curiosity is valued as a skill and is therefore embraced, encouraged and nurtured for children and staff. All questions are seen as valid and children are supported to find their own answers or help each other discover more questions as curiosity drives learning which drives more curiosity and so on. Learning is not seen as linear.
5. Trust is implicit. Head teachers trust their staff – all staff. Teachers trust children. Children trust teachers. Teachers trust their Head. Everyone trusts each other...even in the tough times. Trust is seemingly everywhere and is given rather than necessarily earned. Everyone knows that trust comes with responsibility and they understand the appropriate consequences of mis-using that trust or letting responsibility slip.
6. Leadership is everywhere. Genuine and sustainable cultural change requires brave leadership on many levels. External leadership to perhaps prompt, nudge or initiate change in the first place. Brave internal leadership at the top to make bold decisions when frustrated with the status quo. Trusting leadership to believe in and empower colleagues. Every day leadership from everyone to create every day cultural change – staff and children take responsibility for playing their part and keeping the change moving forward.



## THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This next section presents the outputs of the following two elements of the research process:

4	<i>Analyse and synthesise the collective case studies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse individual participant data to identify key themes/contrasts</li> <li>• Analyse/review the collective case studies for Allan's and Dounby separately</li> <li>• Create unique narratives of change for Allan's and Dounby schools that answer the 'what happened?' question</li> </ul>
5	<i>Cross-case analysis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare/contrast the resulting change narratives from Allan's and Dounby Schools</li> <li>• Define and name developed themes from the narratives</li> <li>• Present a cross-case summary that depicts the commonalities and contrasts in respective change journeys from each school</li> </ul>

In the context of this research, thematic analysis (TA) offered a broad approach that enabled the identification and definition of themes within the various datasets (stories in parts one and two of this book). As Braun and Clarke (2006, p.77) suggested, TA 'offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data'. TA has also become 'recognised as a qualitative research method in its own right' (Willig, 2013, p.179), which feels important to note from a research rigour and validity perspective.

A reflexive TA approach embraces the idea that it is the researcher who is interpreting and creating the analysis structure, coding and themes, and also that any interpretation is carried out within the lens of the researchers own cultural and contextual perspectives and philosophies. This felt relevant and important for this research and helped to make this particular methodological choice. It was also very motivating that reflexive TA is often employed when research seeks to give voice to a group to contribute to social change (Clarke, 2017). Given the intent of my overall research question, (what has enabled change to happen in schools such as Allan's Primary School and Dounby Primary School?), the lure of a data analysis method positioned within a social setting, felt impelling.

To apply the TA process to the datasets from this research (i.e. the stories in parts one and two), I adopted the six-stage approach to TA offered by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarise yourself with the data – listen to recordings; read through transcripts.
2. Generate initial codes – colour coding of sentences/paragraphs within the transcripts.
3. Search for themes – Identify codes that connect to each other – see what is recurring.
4. Review themes – Go back over coding/initial themes – can any be linked? Do any need to be split? Were any missed in the initial theme creation?
5. Define and name the themes – see output below.
6. Produce the report/present the data.

## INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVE THEMES

The following paragraphs present the thematic analysis for each individual narrative. Each theme is named and has an associated descriptor.

N.B. If you refer back to the original narratives in Parts one and two of this book, you will see some of these themes noted in **bold, italic, highlighted** text. You will then notice that not every theme is included in the tables below and that some of them have been merged. This is evidence of the review process between steps 3 and 4 as outlined in the previous page, where some initial themes have been merged, connected, amended or split into themes/sub-themes based on continued reflection on the data and review of the coding.

### 1.0 Emma Gee, Arts Officer, Orkney Islands Council

Initial themes	Reviewed themes	
In at the deep end Hidden Giants	<b>Initiating change</b>	
Brave leadership Right people; right place Leading a revolution; sharing learning Being brave		<b>Brave leadership</b>
Trust yourself Trust your learners Teacher led to pupil trusted	<b>Trust</b>	
Go with the flow, let stuff happen		
Building foundations; moving on Creating impact – looking beyond the activity	<b>Building impact</b>	

Theme name	Descriptor
<b>Initiating change</b>	Making things happen by seizing opportunities and utilising external change agents to try something new.
<b>Brave leadership</b>	Demonstrating courage in action by speaking up, advocating for change, believing in something bigger than you, not being afraid to try new things, bringing people along with you and inspiring others to act together towards the shared vision.
<b>Trust</b>	Trusting yourself to do the right thing; trusting others to take their own actions and learn from their mistakes; trusting in the process; actively demonstrating faith in others.
<b>Go with the flow</b>	Being prepared to wander down unmarked paths without a plan as you trust yourself and your team to be bold and learn from whatever experience lies ahead.
<b>Building impact</b>	Knowing that the actions you take and decisions you make today lead to the change you want tomorrow. Appreciating that nothing stands still and that change is inevitable. Striving for more or better and continually learning from yesterday's experiences.

2.0 *Isean Gibson, Head Teacher, Dounby Primary School, Orkney*

Initial themes		Reviewed themes
Getting messy	→	<b>Freedom</b>
Cutting loose		
Brave leadership		<b>Brave leadership</b>
Facilitating leadership		
Teachers need support too!	→	
Meeting people where they are		
Ownership and responsibility		
Questions drive learning		<b>Curiosity</b>
Being inquisitive	→	
Exploring problems to generate solutions		
Bob: a living breathing ethos	→	<b>Living values</b>
It takes time	→	<b>Time</b>

Theme name	Descriptor
<b>Freedom</b>	Creating an environment where people are prepared to ‘get messy’, try new things and rip up the existing rule book...if they fundamentally believe there are new, different or better ways of learning or working.
<b>Brave leadership</b>	Demonstrating courage in action by speaking up, advocating for change, believing in something bigger than you, not being afraid to try new things, bringing people along with you and inspiring others to act together towards the shared vision.
<b>Curiosity</b>	Actively encouraging and valuing inquisitiveness throughout the school at every level. Believing that effective learning happens when individuals are fully invested in the subject and the environment. Knowing that learning is more than ‘head knowledge’, it is about engaging with hearts and minds to inspire connection.
<b>Living values</b>	Values are more than just a poster on the wall. They are visible throughout the school as they become embedded in the ways in which everything happens and are talked about, shared or named constantly. Values are seen, heard and experienced by anyone who walks into the school building or meets someone in the school community.
<b>Time</b>	An inherent understanding that all change takes time if it is to truly have an impact. This is experienced as patience and a willingness to give things (and people) the space they need to grow and thrive. An appreciation that today’s actions are not an end in themselves, rather a building block for future impact.

3.0 Clare Hoare, *Creating Learning Officer, Stirling Council*

There has to be more to it than this!	→	<b>Wanting more</b>
Is curiosity at the heart of learning?		
Connected learning	→	<b>Curiosity</b>
Five senses learning		
From Maker Space to Design Thinking and beyond		<b>Building impact</b>
This is just the start		
Inspiring others; cascading the concept		<b>Brave leadership</b>
Brave leadership		
Being brave – a lone voice		
Empowering others, nurturing seeds		
Space for conversation		<b>Liminal space</b>
Sitting with uncertainty		

Theme name	Descriptor
<b>Wanting more</b>	A dissatisfaction with the status quo. A belief in better and a willingness to explore...and keep on exploring...what this might mean. An unwillingness to accept that ‘this is how we’ve always done things’ and a curiosity to see what things could be like if you just gave them a chance.
<b>Curiosity</b>	Actively encouraging and valuing inquisitiveness throughout the school at every level. Believing that effective learning happens when individuals are fully invested in the subject and the environment. Knowing that learning is more than ‘head knowledge’, it is about engaging with hearts and minds to inspire connection.
<b>Building impact</b>	Knowing that the actions you take and decisions you make today lead to the change you want tomorrow. Appreciating that nothing stands still and that change is inevitable. Striving for more or better and continually learning from yesterday’s experiences.
<b>Living values</b>	Values are more than just a poster on the wall. They are visible throughout the school as they become embedded in the ways in which everything happens and are talked about, shared or named constantly. Values are seen, heard and experienced by anyone who walks into the school building or meets someone in the school community.
<b>Creating space</b>	Metaphorical space to take a step away from the everyday to contemplate how things could be or how something else might work if given a chance. Support from others to dream big and explore possibilities. A space without limits and where uncertainty is accepted as part of learning – even when it feels really uncomfortable.

4.0 *Lindsey Howland, Head Teacher, Allan's Primary School, Stirling*

Initial themes		Reviewed themes
Building our ethos	→	<b>Living values</b>
Living values		
5Cs and Maker Space	→	<b>Building impact</b>
Curriculum of Hope		
Making lemonade from lemons		
Creating community	→	<b>Trust</b>
We've got this		
Relationships first, last, everything		
A trauma-informed approach	→	<b>Children first</b>
Respecting children's rights		
Courage	→	<b>Brave leadership</b>

Theme name	Descriptor
<b>Living values</b>	Values are more than just a poster on the wall. They are visible throughout the school as they become embedded in the ways in which everything happens and are talked about, shared or named constantly. Values are seen, heard and experienced by anyone who walks into the school building or meets someone in the school community.
<b>Building impact</b>	Knowing that the actions you take and decisions you make today lead to the change you want tomorrow. Appreciating that nothing stands still and that change is inevitable. Striving for more or better and continually learning from yesterday's experiences.
<b>Trust</b>	Trusting yourself to do the right thing; trusting others to take their own actions and learn from their mistakes; trusting in the process; actively demonstrating faith in others.
<b>Children first</b>	An absolute belief that every child needs to know they are loved and hear it when they forget. Genuinely putting the child at the heart of the school. Adopting a trauma-informed approach that sees understands behaviour as an indicator of what is going on for the child, rather than something to be punished. Acting with care and empathy....always.
<b>Brave leadership</b>	Demonstrating courage in action by speaking up, advocating for change, believing in something bigger than you, not being afraid to try new things, bringing people along with you and inspiring others to act together towards the shared vision.

## CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

The following table summarises the themes constructed from each individual narrative, with the Orkney and Stirling outputs displayed together. It is interesting to note any themes occurring twice or more across the analysis phase (colour coded).

Orkney		Stirling	
Emma Gee	Islean Gibson	Clare Hoare	Lindsey Howland
Initiating change	Freedom	Wanting more	Children first
Brave leadership	Brave leadership	Curiosity	Building impact
Trust	Curiosity	Building impact	Trust
Go with the flow	Living values	Living values	Living values
Building impact	Time	Creating space	Brave leadership

It is also interesting to directly compare/contrast the thematic outputs from individuals with similar roles across the cases:

Creative Learning Agents		Head Teachers	
Emma Gee	Clare Hoare	Islean Gibson	Lindsey Howland
Initiating change	Wanting more	Living values	Living values
Brave leadership	Curiosity	Time	Building impact
Trust	Creating space	Curiosity	Trust
Go with the flow	Living values	Freedom	Children first
Building impact	Building impact	Brave leadership	Brave leadership

Observations:

- No theme could be constructed from/applied to every dataset consistently.
- The themes of 'brave leadership', 'building impact' and 'living values' were constructed from the coding of three out of the four datasets.
- Curiosity and trust were witnessed as themes in two of the four datasets.
- 'Brave leadership' and 'living values' were both identified as key themes from the coding of the Head Teacher datasets.
- 'Building impact' was a consistent theme across the Creative Learning Agent datasets.
- When reviewing the definitions of the themes, it could be argued that 'initiating change' and 'wanting more' show enough commonality to be grouped together as one theme, thus connecting the data further as both Creative Learning Agents described the essence of these themes as relevant in their data.
- 'Go with the flow' and 'Creating Space' could arguably be similarly connected.
- Whilst two of their five themes were consistent, there were clear differences in the themes that were developed from the Head Teacher narratives (datasets).
- Whilst there were commonalities/consistencies in the data coding and thematic analysis across all four datasets (narratives), there were unique aspects to each individual dataset that are as important to note as the similarities.

Part four will begin to offer an interpretation of the thematic analysis outputs in direct response to the research questions identified earlier in this chapter (p.70).

**PART FOUR:**  
**IDEAS & OUTPUTS**

## PART FOUR: IDEAS & OUTPUTS

### SO WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS RESEARCH?

Answering the key research question (KRQ).

#### **What has enabled change to happen in schools such as Allan's Primary School (Stirling) and Dounby Primary School (Orkney)?**

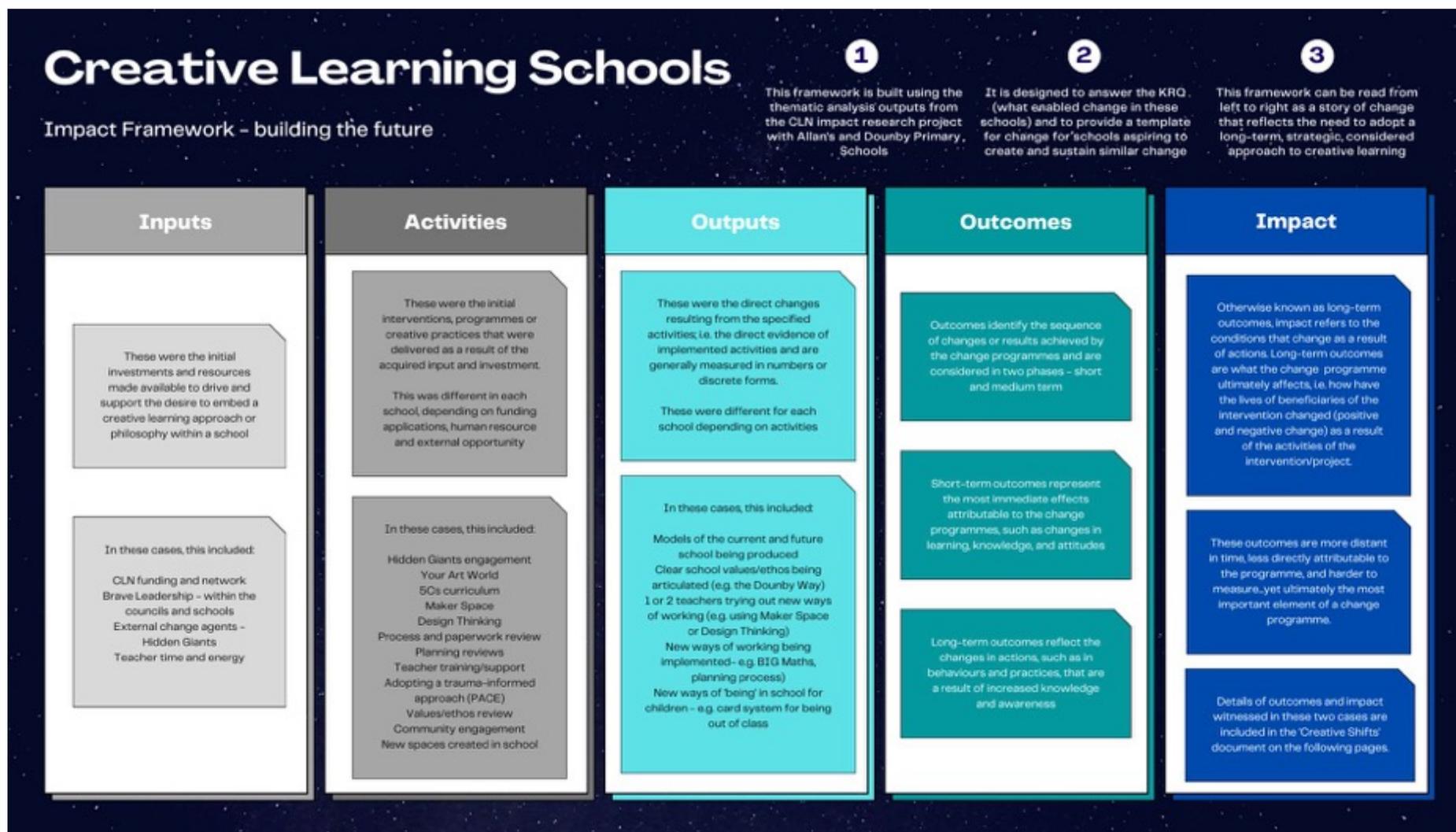
Part Four of this book intends to provide an answer to the KRQ as well as looking to the future and contemplating the question of 'so what can be learned from this research?'. Before presenting an answer it is important to note a number of crucial points relating to the use the case study and narrative as a qualitative research choice:

- Narrative, case study approaches to research enable the gathering of an 'holistic understanding of a set of issues' to describe and explain a particular case or situation, (Gratton and Jones, 2004, p.97).
- Data gathered from each case can only be attributed to that particular study and each case is unique.
- Every individual case is valid and learning can be drawn from each case as long as there is recognition (for example) that 'this happened in this instance given this particular set of circumstances and because of the involvement of these particular people'.
- The case study researcher must avoid temptation to generalise in pursuit of common theory and sweeping generalisations that 'just because it worked in this case means it will work in every case' need to be avoided.
- However...when a researcher properly understands case study methodology, and adopts appropriate qualitative research tools, it provides a very valid research choice, Flyvberg (2011, p,302).
- Therefore...as long as the research methodology is robust, it is possible to reflect on learning/outputs from one (or more) particular cases and present a summary of the case(s) as an answer to a research question in a manner from which future cases can learn.

Given these points, the following diagrams and tables present a summary of the combined stories of Allan's and Dounby Primary Schools in order to demonstrate what has happened in these schools to create and sustain a Creative Learning approach/philosophy/strategy that is reaping positive rewards in terms of child wellbeing, teacher engagement, community connection and, ultimately, pupil attainment.



# IMPACT FRAMEWORK – BUILDING THE FUTURE



N.B. Underpinning this entire framework and approach is a desire to change; an impetus to change; a dissatisfaction with the status quo; a belief that 'there has to be more to it than this' (see 'wanting more' theme descriptor in the thematic analysis output from Clare Hoare, Stirling Council, p.78 above).

## CREATIVE SHIFTS | FROM ACTION TO IMPACT | ALLAN'S AND DOUNBY PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Before Our school has/is...	Activities Our school has/is...	As a result ...		
		Short term outcomes	Medium term outcomes	Longer term impact
<p>Lost connection with its community of parents, families and beyond</p> <p>Children who are disengaged in their learning and feel unhappy being at school</p> <p>Culture that prioritises attainment over child wellbeing</p> <p>Processes driven by control, behaviour management and rigid structure</p> <p>Teachers who feel overwhelmed by planning and paperwork</p> <p>A fear of not meeting attainment standards</p> <p>A focus on teaching as opposed to learning</p> <p>Classes that are teacher directed, led and managed</p> <p>Staff dissatisfied with the status quo and believe there has to be another way</p> <p>A leader who is motivated to learn and try a new approach</p>	<p>Funding from the CLN</p> <p>Support from a key person in our local council</p> <p>Engaged Hidden Giants to help us challenge the status quo and plan the future</p> <p>Adopted a Maker Space or Design Thinking approach</p> <p>Engaged with the 5Cs curriculum</p> <p>Reviewed our school ethos and values so we ALL agree</p> <p>Improved communication with our parents, families and communities</p> <p>Reviewed and streamlined planning processes and other paperwork requirements</p> <p>Researched and implemented new ways of working in subjects across the curriculum</p> <p>Re-designed classrooms and created new environments</p> <p>Tried new things without knowing the outcome</p>	<p>The whole school and wider community know who we are and what we stand for</p> <p>We are really clear about our future creative learning aspirations and strategy</p> <p>We have engaged brilliant creative practitioners who meet a strategic need</p> <p>We have several Maker Space projects in progress OR design thinking underpins one or more areas of our curriculum</p> <p>We know how our wider community feels about key issues – and they know that their views matter</p> <p>Children have spaces they have helped design and in which they feel safe</p> <p>We have tried new ways of working and continue to learn from our efforts</p> <p>Our teachers and children are actively engaged in designing and building their learning</p>	<p>Our school looks and feels different – inside and out</p> <p>We are embracing change and are more comfortable with the idea of not knowing</p> <p>Teachers feel confident to try new things and trust in the process of design thinking or creative learning</p> <p>Curiosity drives learning</p> <p>Children decide what they want to learn and take responsibility for themselves</p> <p>Children know they are loved and that they matter</p> <p>Teachers treat dysregulated behaviour as an indicator of trauma not as something to be punished</p> <p>We all hold each other to account and accept collective responsibility</p> <p>More children are achieving higher standards of learning</p> <p>Teachers feel inspired and refreshed to keep developing and being challenged</p>	<p>We are exceeding attainment targets</p> <p>We are receiving excellent HMIE inspection reports</p> <p>Our approach is recognised by others and held up as exemplar practice</p> <p>Our young people are progressing and thriving in their new school environments and beyond</p> <p>We have moved from a teacher led to pupil trusted environment</p> <p>Children, parents and our wider community want to be involved in our school</p> <p>We have a culture of continuous learning and improvement - everywhere</p> <p>We retain teachers of the highest quality</p> <p>We know there is more to come...this is just the beginning</p> <p>We know we are loved</p>

<p><b>Enablers</b></p> <p>When these things are present, change is accelerated and more likely to be embedded and sustained</p>	<p><b>Brave leadership</b> – leaders demonstrate courage in action by speaking up, advocating for change, believing in something bigger, not being afraid to try new things, bringing people along with them and inspiring others to act together towards the shared vision.</p> <p><b>Living values</b> – Values are more than just a poster on the wall; they are visible throughout the school and embedded in the ways in which everything happens. They are talked about, shared or named constantly. Values are seen, heard and experienced by anyone who walks into the school building or meets someone in the school community.</p> <p><b>Building impact</b> - everyone involved in leading, managing and running the school appreciates that the actions and decisions taken today lead to the change desired tomorrow. There is a shared appreciation that nothing stands still and that change is inevitable. There is a collective sense of striving for more or better and continually learning from yesterday’s experiences.</p> <p><b>Curiosity</b> – Inquisitiveness is encouraged and valued throughout the school at every level. Staff, pupils and the wider community buy into the idea that effective learning happens when individuals are fully invested in the subject and the environment. Everyone appreciates that learning is more than ‘head knowledge’, it is about engaging with hearts and minds to inspire connection.</p> <p><b>Trust</b> – everyone is trusted to do the right thing; individuals trust themselves and have confidence that others will take their own actions and learn from their mistakes. There is also trust in the process with staff and pupils actively demonstrating faith in others.</p> <p><b>Time</b> – There is an inherent understanding that all change takes time if it is to truly have an impact. This is experienced as patience and a willingness to give things (and people) the space they need to grow and thrive. An appreciation that today’s actions are not an end in themselves, rather a building block for future impact.</p>
<p><b>Barriers</b></p> <p>When present, these things will inhibit change and slow any potential progress</p>	<p><b>Change resistant culture</b> – staff, children or school stakeholders consciously or unconsciously disrupt change by seeking to protect their positions, ways of working or existing processes. There is also fear of change, failure or not meeting standards</p> <p><b>Lack of clarity and/or strategy</b> – school does not have a clear vision of what an creative learning culture looks or feels like</p> <p><b>Lack of wider community engagement</b> – wider school community is ignored and only traditional leaders are involved in change</p> <p><b>Ineffective communication</b> – there are no, or poor, mechanisms of communication in place between staff and the community</p> <p><b>Change fatigue</b> – there is an apathy towards change of any sort; individuals do not engage as they do not see this as their responsibility and are tired, burnt out or frustrated with the thought of ‘yet another initiative’</p> <p><b>Lonely leadership</b> – the school leadership does not have the support of key staff and stakeholders in the wider community</p> <p><b>Deep connection to the past</b> – a strong and overwhelming culture of ‘this is how we have always done it’</p> <p><b>Loss or lack of funding</b> – financial resources to accelerate the change process are non-existent, removed or restricted</p>

## SO WHAT?

The all-important question at the end of any research project is to ask ‘so what?’. So what does this matter? So what really happened? So what can we learn? So what will be useful? So what really is the point? And there will undoubtedly be many more questions flying around as this report reaches its conclusion...which is a great thing because, as we have discovered from these case studies, questions drive learning.

Let us first revisit the main research question established early on in this process:

- **What has enabled change to happen in schools such as Allan’s Primary School (Stirling) and Dounby Primary School (Orkney)?**

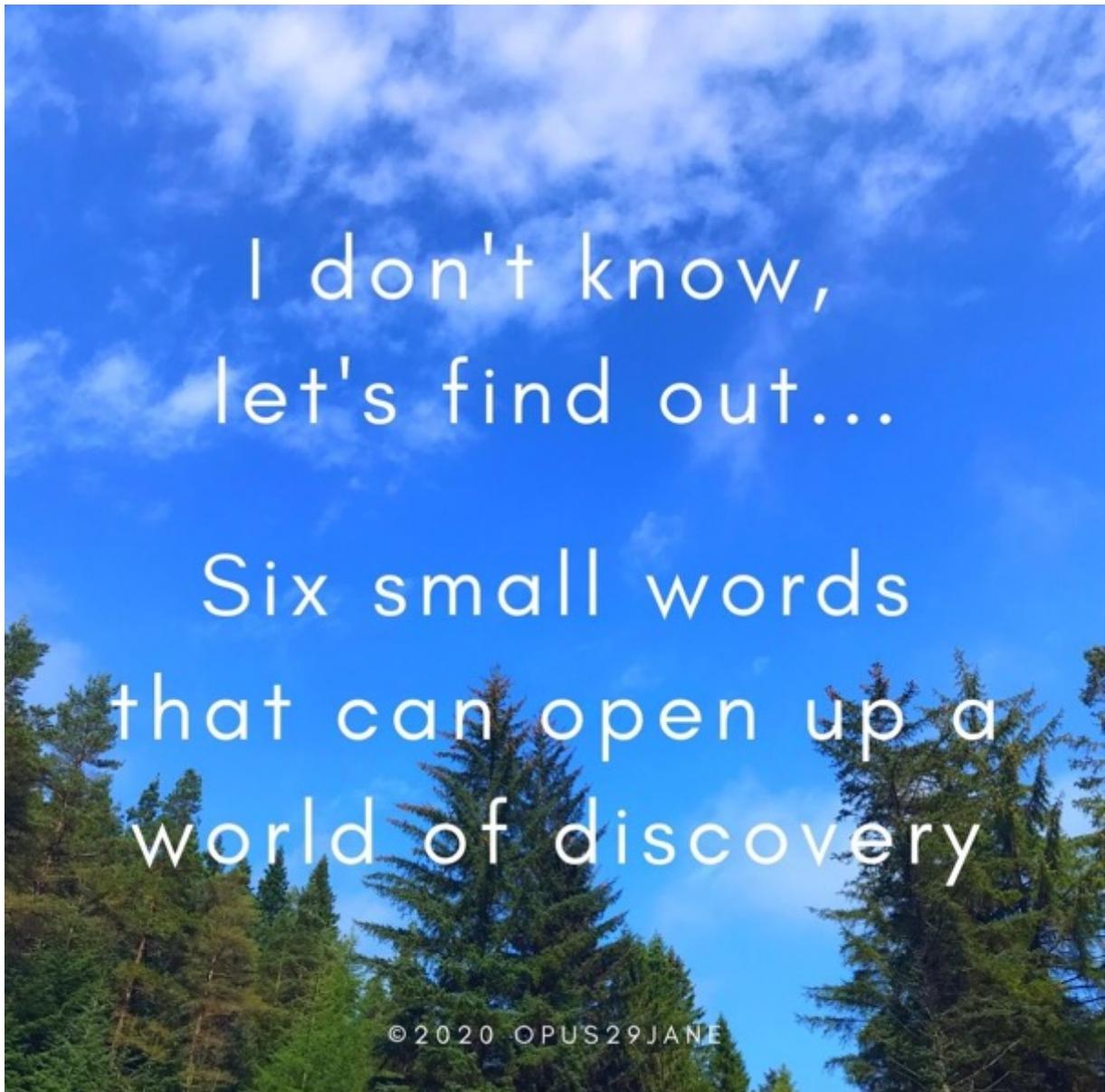
By exploring and analysing stories of those involved at the heart of these changes, it has been possible to construct an answer to this question through this research. This answer has robustness and rigour because of the clear qualitative methodology chosen and applied throughout the process. It is important to note, however, that within the realms of any qualitative research carried out under a ‘constructivist-interpretivist’ paradigm, this is simply one version of the story in a world of multiple possibilities.

Yet, within this set of circumstances, through this research process and within this research framework, it is possible to offer a good degree of confidence and assurance that this version of the story can be relied upon to inform future practice. It is relevant and has meaning, which, in a world where learning is about sense-making and application, feels highly apt and appropriate for a report about creative learning.

So what enabled change to happen? As articulated in the ‘Creative Shifts’ framework in the preceding pages, change happened because the following themes were in place within both Allan’s and Dounby Primary Schools. They may have looked a little different, and the exact approaches may have taken different paths, yet fundamentally these things were in place in both schools to initiate, drive and sustain the desired change (definitions/descriptors of the above themes are included in previous pages):

- Brave leadership
- Living values
- Building impact
- Curiosity
- Trust
- Time

It is also imperative to recognise that these changes only occurred in the first instance because of a sense of ‘wanting more’; a kind of dissatisfaction with the status quo and a belief that there ‘has to be more to it than this’. Equally, these changes were initiated and given ‘air to breathe’ in the early days through the funding made available through the Creative Learning Network (CLN). Recognising that every change effort needs initial inputs (investments), it is arguably highly likely that none of these changes would have been enabled, or at least these changes would have taken much longer to initiate, without the early investment of CLN funding to employ external agents of change (Hidden Giants and CCE – Creativity, Culture and Education) to challenge existing thinking and model future ambitions.



This report has been researched, prepared and submitted to Emma Gee, Orkney Islands Council and Clare Hoare, Stirling Council by Dr Jane Booth, Opus 29 Consultancy.

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## EPILOGUE

This report started with a genuine contemplation about the most effective and impactful way to present the findings of a piece of research with creativity at its heart. A question around how it was even possible to do justice to the inspiring learning and people (staff and pupils) I met and experienced during my time with Allan's and Dounby Primary Schools. The importance of giving voice to these wonderful individuals and sharing the unique, yet connected, approaches that have been evolved within both schools was paramount...and I sincerely hope that even a small percentage of this has been captured within this report.

As I sit here and reflect up my journey alongside these schools for the past six months, I am struck by three things in particular.

1. The brave leadership of all involved in each school. And critically, when I say leadership, I mean the everyday leadership I witnessed at every level of humanity within these schools. From the external change agents coming in and initiating the early conversations that enabled people to see that there was a different way of 'doing things round here' to the bold, compassionate, inspirational head teachers; the quiet, determined Arts and Creative Learning Officers within the two Councils to the caring, daring teachers willing to embrace new things and embrace learning without ceilings. Also the leadership I saw from the young people in both schools. They are curious beyond measure, caring, conversational, creative, competent and confident...all of those 5 Cs and more. They are leading themselves and each other in learning...and I have no doubt will go on to lead great things in their everyday lives of the future.
2. Seeing wellbeing, care and love positioned deliberately at the heart of the school and the curriculum. That there is no fear of talking about love, of ensuring the young people know they are loved, and the open willingness in which hugs are provided to children for whom that is essential for their learning in the moment. I am reminded of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the idea that if we are ever to reach the potential for which we are destined, we first must have our basic needs met. Safety, food, water...and love. I see this reflected in both schools and, that in moving the emphasis to an absolute and genuine commitment to pupil wellbeing, they are ultimately achieving their school attainment targets...and so much more. There is such a lesson in here...and not just for schools. For workplaces, for high performance sport and much, much more.
3. The critical role of the initial funding from the Creative Learning Network in opening up possibilities for school and learning to 'look different'. In both stories, all key individuals acknowledged the crucial role played by Paul Gorman and Matthew Sowerby<sup>8</sup> in opening up the conversations around creative learning. This work, particularly the conversations and future modelling exercises that provided a platform from which the Head Teachers could build a creative approach, felt particularly important. It therefore did not feel right to conclude this report without specifically referencing that, without the initial funding from CLN, arguably none of this work would exist...or if it did, it may not be anywhere near as developed or evolved. For me, the value of this initial funding from CLN has to be viewed as so much more than a financial transaction...rather it is an investment that has generated, kick-started and unleashed a return that perhaps feels sometimes beyond belief. For me, the true value of this funding can be seen in the creative, curious, caring, compassionate, competent, confident young people emerging from Allan's and Dounby Schools. All the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills and more. Now that feels like a perfect way to end.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Gorman, Matthew Sowerby; Hidden Giants, educational innovators/creative practitioners – external change agents

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If reading this report has sparked your interest and ignited your curiosity and you would like to learn more about any aspect of this report, please get in touch.

Dr Jane Booth – researcher and report author  
Opus 29 Consultancy  
[jane@opus29.co.uk](mailto:jane@opus29.co.uk)

Emma Gee – Arts Officer  
Orkney Islands Council  
[Emma.Gee@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:Emma.Gee@orkney.gov.uk)

Clare Hoare - Learning Development Officer (Creativity and Culture)  
Stirling Council  
[hoarec@stirling.gov.uk](mailto:hoarec@stirling.gov.uk)