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Characterising affective and situational dimensions of creativity in the primary classroom through a posthuman lens

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of creativity frameworks can be problematic for teachers and learners seeking to develop creativity in day-to-day classroom practices. Although some schools have successfully adopted standardised models, others lack models that are tailored to localised contexts and interface with pedagogical provision. This article reports on the development of one of eight projects part of the nationwide programme, Arts Council England Creativity Collaboratives. Using data collected through creative qualitative methods, we discuss how these partnerships have fostered novel and engaging creative encounters that exceed human-to-human interactions. In contrast to existing creativity frameworks, we advocate a posthuman perspective that recognises the importance of affective and situational intra-actions between human and non-human agents. Finally, we examine how such factors contribute to the development of ethical and inclusive understandings of creativity for learners aged 4–11 that account for their specific needs as well as those of their teachers and schools.

Introduction

In this article, we explore the intricate dynamics of creativity in teaching and learning within primary schools in England. We aim to highlight the significance of adopting a posthuman perspective upon creativity – one that fosters inclusive and diverse perceptions of what it means to be and become a learner. Posthumanism offers a paradigm shift in understanding humans, including teachers and learners, as interconnected and inseparable from other beings (Barad 2003; 2007). Embracing a post-humanist approach to education involves re-evaluating pedagogy and knowledge by challenging conventional anthropocentric perspectives and cultivating a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all aspects of the learning environment.

Such a perspective veers away from existing models of creativity rooted in humanism, which rigidly define knowledge within specific anthropocentric forms of communication and collaboration. Drawing on data obtained from an Arts Council England project located in the West Midlands, we will concentrate on two pivotal issues: the imperative to broaden existing frameworks and models of creativity through a posthuman lens, and the impact of such an approach upon cultivating creative teaching and learning practices that are inclusive and ethical. We will engage in critical debate of existing models and frameworks of creativity commonly employed in primary schools, before exploring perspectives and vignettes that reveal the potential importance of adopting a posthuman lens.

Current creative approaches: benefits and limitations

Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a burgeoning interest in the field of research into creativity in education. Researchers have sought to theorise and model the nature of creativities, and to develop frameworks for assessing them in educational contexts. Broadly speaking, the earliest such research adopted an individualist, psychological approach pursuing rigid, standardised models that sought to be applied across contexts and populations. However, in recognising the influential role of diverse individual, social, and situational factors upon such models, subsequent research called for a constructivist, sociocultural (and later, ecological) perspective (Sprague and Parsons 2012).

Models of creativity

The earliest theory that sought to delineate the individual creative process was the 1926 four-stage model attributed to Wallas. He described four discrete steps in the creative process: preparation (analysis of the problem); incubation (time away from the problem); illumination (identification of promising solutions); and verification (evaluation and refining of solutions) (Lubart 2001). Although the model continued to underpin some developments in theory and analysis into the twenty-first century (e.g. Burnard and Younker 2004; Kaufman and Sternberg 2006), empirical investigation questioned the evidence for Wallas' four distinct stages (Lubart 2001) and highlighted the disjuncture between the procedural steps and their sociocultural situatedness.

The same was true of later well-known theories of creativity in the individualist tradition, such as Rhodes' 4P theoretical framework dating from 1961. The 4Ps referred to four factors contributing to creativity: person, press (i.e. the environment or context), process, and product. Though these four factors accounted for the impact of both individual (person) and contextual (press) differences within creative processes, they lacked sufficient nuance to differentiate between micro – and macro-scale influences such as affective experiences, social relationships, and environmental enablers. Subsequent theorists therefore adapted and re-imagined the framework in an attempt to capture greater complexity – as 5As (actor, action, artefact, audience, affordances; Glăveanu 2013), 7Cs (creators, creating, collaborations, contexts, creations, consumption, curricula; Lubart and Thornhill-Miller 2019), 5Ps (person, press, process, product, position; Randles 2020), and 8Ps (purpose, person, press, problem, process, product, propulsion, public; Sternberg and Karami 2022).

While becoming increasingly intricate, these more recent models of creativity offered greater attention to the varied and iterative sub-processes involved in creative experiences. Moving away from the over-simplification of Wallas and Rhodes' four-part frameworks, the eight-factor propulsion model (Sternberg, Kaufman, and Pretz 2004) highlighted different ways in which creativity could manifest depending on circumstances: through replication, redefinition, forward incrementation, or advance forward incrementation; and through redirection, reconstruction, reinitiation, or integration. In doing so, it began to capture the sociocultural situatedness of creativity and the similarities and differences between so-called 'Big-C' and 'little-c' creativities. In opposition to established models that emphasised Big-C, prodigious, or 'genius' creativities, in its first four factors the eight-factor propulsion model captured little-c, everyday creativities, such as those enacted by teachers and learners in the classroom (Kaufman and Sternberg 2006; Sternberg and Karami 2022).

In moving towards more complex models 'exploring the ecology of creativity' (Sprague and Parsons 2012, 396), twenty-first-century theorists began to conceptualise creativity through enabling networks rather than through linear processes. Encapsulating both micro – and macro-scale influences upon creative processes, the concept of 'possibility thinking' posited that creativity requires immersive environments rich in playfulness; the permeation of intentional action, self-determination, and learner agency; opportunities for imagination, risk-taking, question posing, and question responding; and potentially innovative outcomes (Craft 2010; Cremin, Burnard, and Craft 2006). Such creativity-enabling contexts emphasise the human and more-than-human interactions facilitated

within classrooms, as teachers take on the responsibility, first, for fostering learners' intrinsic motivation through dialogic interactions that facilitate self-discovery, and second, for designing physical spaces where non-human materials invite engagement and experimentation (Sprague and Parsons 2012, 402).

Assessments of creativity

Alongside the development of varied models of creativity, there has grown a substantial body of research into the potential for assessing creativities in the classroom. Assessment of creativity through performance or behaviour data, self-report data, or standardised testing (Sprague and Parsons 2012; Treffinger et al. 2002) can reinforce its value in education, develop facilitative curricula, and offer formative feedback to teachers and learners (Lucas 2016).

Varied methods including predefined rating scales, inventories, or tests (e.g. Treffinger et al. 2002), formative assessment or profiling (e.g. Lucas 2016), and assessment by consensus (e.g. Kokotsaki and Newton 2015) have all been highlighted as influential in classroom-based teaching and learning (Bolden et al. 2020; Long et al. 2022). But one increasingly popular evaluation model has been the assessment of five creative habits of mind: the dispositions of being inquisitive, imaginative, persistent, collaborative, and disciplined (Lucas 2016). While this framework allows teachers and pupils to rate their progress through reflecting on diverse sub-categories such as 'playing with possibilities' and 'sticking with difficulty' (Lucas and Spencer 2017), it constructs a strictly delineated understanding of creativity. Like other assessment models, it reflects a wider tendency for schools to favour specific linguistic, logical, and compliant intelligences over those that may be spatial, kinaesthetic – or more-than-human (cf. Sprague and Parsons 2012).

Challenges to teaching and learning

The preponderance of theoretical models and assessment frameworks developed over the past century is a testament to the growing recognition that fostering creativity is an important – or even essential – aspect of education (cf. Turner 2013). Notably, the shift towards context-driven, ecological conceptualisations suggests an understanding of creativity as achievable by anyone, rather than as the preserve of a few gifted individuals. However, while educational discourse around creativity has broadened its horizons, its expansion 'has been paralleled by an expansion of performativity policies' (Craft and Jeffrey 2008, 579). The increasing status afforded to standardised testing suggests that schools are expected to innovate and take risks while also meeting rigorous accountability measures. In turn, this has the potential to drive teachers to abandon rich, multifaceted concepts of creativity, and instead pursue condensed frameworks that can easily be implemented in the classroom.

This pursuit of performative frameworks for measuring creativity is evident in the development of educational policy in England. In 1999, the Creative Partnerships programme promoted the role of partnerships between schools and outside agencies as means for fostering creative experiences (NACCCE 1999). These partnerships – which ran until 2011 – aimed to encourage and equip teachers to facilitate creativity through working closely with creative practitioners, rather than through adopting prescriptive theories or assessments. In contrast, the more recent Creative Thinking Assessment piloted by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) offered teachers a simple, tripartite model of the creative process: generating creative ideas; generating diverse ideas; and evaluating and improving ideas (OECD 2022). While it does make additional connections to written and visual expression, and social and scientific problem-solving, it fundamentally mirrors the individualistic, process-driven models of the early-twentieth century rather than the complex ecological conceptualisations that have emerged more recently (cf. Burnard and Younker 2004; Lubart 2001).

In this article, we focus specifically on the current Arts Council England programme, Creativity Collaboratives (2021–2024). Like Creative Partnerships – which was a direct result of the report, *All Our*

Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education (NACCCE 1999) – Creativity Collaboratives followed the publication of the *Durham Commission on Creativity and Education* (2019). After a dearth of political action on creative education since the *Cultural Education in England* report following Creative Partnerships (DCMS & DfE 2012), the Durham Commission recommended the establishment of collaborative networks of schools to share and assess innovative practices in teaching for creativity. The three-year Creativity Collaboratives programme is therefore working with educators to co-develop creative pedagogies, test out teaching practices, and evaluate their impact on learners, schools, and communities. It aims to nurture young people's creative capacity, wellbeing, and academic development, and reduce inequality across protected characteristics. Through equipping educators to teach for creativity and advocate teaching-for-creativity pedagogies, it seeks to ensure that creativity is prioritised and practised across networks, curricula, and career pathways.

However, although the Durham Commission emphasised the importance of discovering, establishing, and sustaining the best conditions for facilitating creativity in the classroom (ACE 2019, 18), Creativity Collaboratives has been driven by case studies of different applications of the five creative habits of mind (66–67). This reliance on one framework of creativity contravenes the assertion that 'no single test or program has demonstrated increased creative ability or predicted, with certainty, real-life creative production' (Sprague and Parsons 2012, 314). In doing so, it also risks abandoning complex, 'never arriving' (Young 2021) conceptualisations of creativity that account for less tangible ways of knowing such as affective experience and sociocultural situatedness.

In this article, we therefore explore the unique approach of one of the eight nationwide Creativity Collaboratives, which – in the interests of recognising 'different forms of logics, rationality and affect' (Burnard 2022, 30) and 'exploding deeply entrenched ideas' (27) – has sought to develop explorative partnerships over fixed frameworks. We discuss how these partnerships have stimulated engaging creative encounters that exceed human-to-human interactions, and advocate a posthuman perspective upon creative classroom spaces to highlight the importance of affective and situational intra-actions between human and non-human agents such as classroom furniture, artefacts, and materials. We suggest that recognising such factors could go some way towards countering overly prescriptive, performative creativity frameworks, and thereby contribute to the development of ethical and inclusive approaches that interface with the specific needs of individual teachers, learners, and schools (Weaver-Hightower 2008).

Posthumanism and creativity: a theoretical shift

Since a notable portion of educational creativities research is grounded in a humanist perspective, it typically establishes distinct hierarchies and divisions between mind and body, human and non-human. Ingold (2020) suggests that neoliberalism has had a significant influence on this perspective which 'converts every possible thing into a tradeable commodity, with a certain exchange value […] under neoliberalism, intrinsic values – the immanent worth of things – crumble into dust' (433). This often leads to a prioritisation of performative knowledge and a pedagogical approach where the expert teacher imparts information to the yet-to-be-formed learner (Dweck 2006). This can be limiting in the primary-school classroom due to a patriarchal elevation of a privileged archetype characterised by traits such as whiteness, able-bodiedness, cisgender identity, and maleness (Murris 2018). Consequently, this relegates all other human and non-human factors to a position of inferiority.

Given that the premise of the Creativity Collaboratives programme is to explore innovative and inclusive practices in teaching for creativity, we believe that this can only be achieved through disrupting ways of thinking about creativity in the classroom. Posthumanism offers this opportunity for new thinking and system-wide change, towards what Wolfe (2013) classifies as 'imaginative ways of understanding relations between lives' (1). The posthuman turn has profoundly changed the field of educational research through the emergent recognition of the entanglements, forces, and connections with and between the human and non-human. Posthumanism's non-anthropocentric ontology

highlights the interrelationship between how humans, non-human entities, and material artefacts come into being:

> put simply, more-than-critical methodologies are needed for a more-than-human world […] how we live, eat, drink, breathe, commute, hear, see, smell, touch, sense, and experience life are inextricable from our local ecologies. Humans are characters in a cast of many. (Ulmer 2017, 3)

Posthumanist scholars such as Braidotti, Haraway, Bennett, and Barad offer valuable insights for re-thinking creativity in the primary classroom and responding to the challenges and limitations presented by current creativity frameworks. Braidotti (2013) helpfully critiques the anthropocentric bias inherent to humanism, which situates humans at the fore of existence:

> posthuman theory is a generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as 'anthropocene' […]. By extension, it can also help us re-think the basic tenets of our interaction with both human and non-human agents on a planetary scale. (5–6)

Refuting the anthropocentric perspective helps us recognise that, irrespective of our differences, we are all interconnected and influenced by the broader ecological system. Creativity, therefore, cannot by understood according to hierarchies of specific forms of bodies, communication, and interaction – hierarchies that are often prevalent in primary classroom environments. Braidotti (2013) emphasises that nobody knows what a body can do. Consequently, in the primary classroom, we can embrace differences, fostering a more just and equitable learning environment for creativities to flourish.

Bennett's (2010) concept of the 'vitality of matter' (vii) further acknowledges the influence of non-human materialities in disrupting conventional notions of agency. For Bennett, it is essential to make distinctions among various 'ontological types' (10), such as food, water, and sounds, to recognise their potential for eliciting new responses. She therefore invites us to consider a different onto-story, one that interrupts conventional understandings of being in the world:

> by 'vitality' I mean the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi-agents or forces with trajectories, openings, or tendencies of their own. (viii)

As Ingold (2020) notes, by overlooking these influential factors, much current research, practice, and policy relating to creativities in primary classrooms promotes a limited understanding of the world. Instead, we should be considering, for example, how classroom spaces are arranged, their location and dimensions, and images and artefacts – all of which have agentic forces. Importantly, Braidotti and Bennett do not remove the human from exploration but implore us to reconsider our relationship with others. Barad's (2003) concept of intra-action, in contrast to interaction, begins to reframe relationality by positioning the formation of the 'self' in relation to and through entanglement with others – whether they be human, non-human, or environmental. This re-centring requires a performative understanding which moves away from the powers of language and linguistics and the separation of the social, cultural, and material (Barad 2007). In classroom-based research this responsive approach considers how knowledge is formed through such things as embodied encounters, the wider school environment, and materials and artefacts. Each is seen as being affected and being capable of affecting the other (Delanda 2006). For Barad (2007), everyone and everything is engaged in 'the ongoing dynamism of becoming' (142). The perspectives of Braidotti, Bennett, and Barad collectively emphasise a central aspect of the posthuman perspective – the importance of an ethic of care.

Towards an ethics of response-ability

In the primary school context, an ethic of care signifies a more inclusive approach to thinking, acting, and being in the classroom. Haraway (1997) articulates this concept as 'response-ability'. Instead of merely assuming responsibility for others, response-ability compels us to contemplate our actions, learning processes, and our responsiveness to beings of all forms. In alignment with the theorisations

of Braidotti, Barad, and Bennett, the notion of response-ability and pedagogical practices in the class-room become intricately entangled and cannot and should not be separated. Consequently, recog-nising and embracing ethical response-ability towards 'things' represents a powerful means to drive change within school processes, practices, and policies. This is emphasised by Bozalek and Zembylas (2017), who state, 'relational processes through which social, political, and material entanglements […] are rendered capable through each other to bring about social transformation' (64). Posthuman-ism is, therefore, a challenge to think beyond the notion of the individual teacher and learner, instead drawing attention to entanglements within and beyond the classroom. As Taylor (2016) notes, 'posthumanism invites us (humans) to undo the current ways of doing, and then imagine, invent and do the doing differently' (6).

Methodology

In this article, we report on the Creativity Collaborative in the West Midlands using data derived from the first two years of the project. The Creativity Collaborative facilitated partnerships between nine primary academies in the West Midlands, and two local arts organisations: Oscott Theatre and Aston Collective.[1] Oscott Theatre is a charitable organisation that works primarily with young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Their practitioners use non-verbal physical theatre to explore young people's creativity, enhance learning outcomes, and develop sense of self. Aston Collective is a theatre company that specialises in creating bespoke, collaborative arts practices to help schools better support the needs of their learners.

Over the course of Year Two, each academy developed a partnership with one or two prac-titioners from Oscott Theatre or Aston Collective. The same practitioner would typically visit the school once a week over one or several terms to work with a specific group of learners. This varied from small, mixed-age groups of learners with Social, Emotional, or Mental Health (SEMH) needs or SEND, to whole classes or year groups. Oscott Theatre most commonly worked with lear-ners aged between four and eight, while Aston Collective typically worked with the eight to nine age range. At every school, one teacher acted as the Creativity Lead; sometimes these teachers attended sessions with creative practitioners, but sometimes class teachers or SEND support staff attended sessions instead. The research evaluation was approved by [anonymous university] Ethics Commit-tee. Informed consent (and, where necessary, parental consent) was given by all participants.

Methods

Using qualitative, creative, and arts-based methods (Barone and Eisner 2012), we investigated the experiences and perceptions of teachers, learners, and creative practitioners during the Creativity Collaboratives partnerships. Engaging in creative approaches to data collection allowed us to explore 'the affective-material life' of creative classroom spaces (Niccolini, Zarabadi, and Ringrose 2018, 324) and consider the importance of intra-action between human and non-human agents in prompting new ways of knowing, communicating, and collaborating (Burnard 2022; Taylor and Fairchild 2020). Arts-based methods in particular enabled participation from learners who preferred not to communicate using literacy-based approaches (such as questionnaires or surveys) (Blaisdell et al. 2019; Mand 2012).

The methods remained flexible, but also allowed us to reveal complex narratives around partici-pation and impact without losing rigour. In sum, data collection involved researcher observations of school-based sessions with Oscott Theatre and Aston Collective; teachers' termly reflection diaries on creative pedagogy and practice; creative focus groups with learners using visual elicitation (Epstein et al. 2006; Lapenta 2011) and arts-based activities (Blaisdell et al. 2019) to explore their experiences of creativity; and online focus groups with teachers and creative practitioners, using arts-based mapping activities and dialogic discussion to investigate frameworks for teaching for creativity (cf. Sternberg and Karami 2022).

Analysis

Observations, reflection diaries, and focus group transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2013). This iterative approach enabled us to become familiar with participants' perspectives. Throughout this analysis, we collaborated closely with the arts-based data (photos, videos, artefacts, and online mind-mapping) and consistently referenced relevant theory. By engaging in a discursive dialogue with theory, we were able to identify what MacLure (2013) refers to as 'glow moments'. This process allowed us to delve 'beneath the surface' (Braun and Clarke 2013, 174) and explore the rationale behind participants' interpretations of the Creativity Collaborative.

In the findings that follow, we present perspectives gathered from teachers and learners through the incorporation of vignettes. Vignettes serve as gateways for readers to delve into the intricate creativities and experiences of participants. Crafted by combining data such as fieldnotes, photos, artefacts, and images, these vignettes aim to move beyond thick description, facilitating readers' active engagement. They act as conduits for affect, fostering empathy, reflection, and deeper engagement with the lived realities of participants (Bloom-Christen and Grunow 2022). As researchers, the process of crafting vignettes provided us with opportunities for introspection and reflection, deepening our understanding of the creative complexities of the project. Beyond mere storytelling, the vignettes allow for a nuanced exploration of themes that may not immediately be apparent within the data, thereby representing not only a creative writing endeavour but also the generation of new knowledge.

Findings: insights from sessions with oscott theatre and aston collective

Our findings illuminated the explorative partnerships between the academies and creative organisations, tracing the emergence and significance of affective and situational dimensions of creativity through what unfolded during school-based sessions.

Oscott theatre: valuing affective and non-human creativities

In breaking away from verbal pedagogies, Oscott Theatre sessions were formed of non-verbal intra-actions between learners, teachers, creative practitioners, and more-than-human materials. Learners were invited to respond to and build on various cues from practitioners using non-verbal communication (e.g. physical motions, facial expressions, mime, and imaginative entanglements with materials) and vice versa, creating a series of improvisatory and ever-shifting creative social exchanges. Some actions and movements were particularly absorbing and would immediately capture learners' imaginations, provoking a reaction of embodied creative activity which spread between pairs and groups:

> Zara [creative practitioner] reaches into her bag and anticipation fills the air. She pulls out a small beanbag – correction, hot potato. Let me tell you, when the potato landed in my hand, I jumped in the air in shock and swerved as fast I could in the direction of my classmate and chucked it at them … I couldn't stop staring as he juggled it between two hands and blew on it to keep it cool. Zara stood in front of him and copied him … before we knew it, they were doing the limbo together (while juggling potatoes) … seeing who could arch their backs the lowest! It was so funny, and we cheered them on and clapped and stamped our feet …

Previously, non-verbal processes had been foreign to learners' classroom experiences and were perceived as 'different to what we do at school' (Learner). One described sessions as 'a bit weird. It felt like it was a silent film' (Learner). But nevertheless, the novel approach positively impacted learners' confidence and participation. As one teacher shared:

> [when the learner] realised that he didn't have to talk in the sessions, he suddenly was allowed to just shed this suit of fear he had on him about talking, and could join in, because it didn't matter if he stood up and he went over and he did the silly things, because he wasn't expected to speak. (Teacher)

During sessions with Oscott Theatre, actions frequently incorporated materials such as scarves and hats, as well as chairs and other classroom objects: 'my favourite is when [the practitioner], with the scarf, when he's moving it around and then we try to catch it' (Learner). In one session, for example, a scarf carried a perturbing vitality (Bennett 2010) in becoming a tightrope that required participants to bend their knees and stretch out their arms as they negotiated the crossing:

> Zara lifts a set of scarves out of the bag. They are tied together creating one long super-scarf. My friend next to me swings their legs in excitement. Zara places the super-scarf in the middle of the circle and finds herself faced with an extremely high tightrope. The drop is too high, and she can't afford to fall off. She wobbles along it frowning and tutting, and nearly, nearly, nose-dives … gasps pierce the air. We jump up and dot ourselves around, linking arms, crouching, creating a safety net to catch her.

In this instance, the textural malleability of the classroom's soft seating shaped how the learner negotiated their tightrope crossing; its 'thing power' (Bennett 2010) emboldened them to climb onto and bounce on the seating and catapult themselves into the air, flying clear of the tightrope altogether. Playful interactions with materials like these were central to fostering creativity: 'I feel creative when like … you know when [the practitioner] gets different things out – he gets, like, different hats out … ' (Learner).

In between these animated, dynamic moments, activity would pause, giving way to silence and stillness. This sense of fluidity, whereby creative offerings ebbed and flowed between participants, was facilitated by the classroom layout. Learners and teachers joined the creative practitioner in a seated circle, granting all participants access to an equally shared, visible, and explorative space in the centre that learners could choose to enter and engage with (or not) at their own pace:

> I'll crawl around like a lion when that low, bass music comes on and then fall asleep. You should see what my friend does … she swivels and swivels around the circle weaving her way in between everyone. I heard her whisper, eyes shining, 'I can be a ballerina' – having seen her swivelling, I think she is right.

Resonating with notions of slow knowledge and pedagogy (Clark 2022), creative practitioners allowed space for learners to linger over different feelings, sensations, personas, and rhythms:

> Zara notices everything. I remember that time when we were frozen still like statues and my friend lay down on the floor … I'd never seen someone do that in a school classroom! Zara lay down next to him and they just peacefully rested there together … things slowed down for a moment. Then, she gave him a high five, which made everyone smile.

Meanwhile, other learners swung their legs to the beat of the music, which played continuously throughout the sessions and set the tone for the different human and non-human encounters:

> the music starts and shoulders bounce. The circle is alive with giggles and smiles. We are connecting to the rhythm, becoming aware of all the sounds … becoming aware of our bodies: how tapping knees and punching the air creates patterns, vibrations, connections.

Permitting a variety of modes of participation reflected Oscott Theatre's ethos to discover creativities that worked for each individual, aided by setting up multi-sensory explorative spaces as means for connection. All responses were valued (demonstrated by frequent high-fives between the creative practitioners and participants, which the learners would later anticipate and initiate themselves), elevated, and generative, becoming important stimuli for subsequent gestures and improvisations. As noted by one teacher, 'the serious way [the practitioners] take all [the learners'] contributions nurtures divergent thinking' (Teacher).

During sessions, potentially challenging behaviour was skilfully diverted and channelled into new creative encounters. Instilling that there was no 'correct' way to take part, creative practitioners modelled interpersonal qualities such as attunement to others (Bresler 2018), relinquishing control, and flexibility. This promoted a caring attitude among learners, who were 'learning empathy […]. Children hold space for their peers that are feeling nervous or uncomfortable, encouraging them to have a go or making it easier for them by passing them the hat or a prop … ' (Teacher). As

described by participants and illustrated in this vignette, during Oscott Theatre's sessions creativities were facilitated by affective, physical, and material intra-actions. Learners and teachers began to use artefacts for tactile communication; they engaged with diverse and atmospheric sounds; and they intra-acted with the classroom environment. They were immersed in sensory experiences and began to understand how those experiences amplified their creative expressions. Guided by this new perspective, they expanded conventional classroom ways of being and doing. This fostered diverse modes of expression and nurtured a heightened awareness of the significance of the learning environment.

This affective creativity was facilitated by four key factors. First, *multimodal communication* occurred not only through words but gestures, body language, facial expressions, music, and movement. This richness in communication opened varied channels for expression and creativity. Second, learners and teachers explored creativities through their emotions and physical actions, forging a deeply *embodied experience*. Furthermore, this tapped into *multisensory creativities*, allowing participants to explore textures, shapes, colours, sounds, movements, atmospheres, and other sensory elements that might otherwise have been excluded. This expanded understandings of the creative classroom ecosystem as one that includes the more-than-human. Finally, the practices led by the creative practitioners enabled learners and teachers to *break linguistic constraints*. In the context of the primary classroom, conventional linguistic communication often limits the scope of interaction and expression. However, when viewed through a posthuman lens, we observed that certain educational practices (such as co-constructing imaginative episodes through juggling, jumping, swivelling, and high-fiving) actively disrupted these linguistic boundaries. These practices fostered a more inclusive understanding of communication, where language was not confined to the traditional spoken or written word but extended to include non-verbal forms of expression, such as embodied gestures, visual symbols, and interactions with material artefacts. In this sense, the classroom became a space where linguistic constraints were transcended, and in which learners were free to engage in a more inclusive and equitable space through their preferred modes of communication.

Aston collective: valuing situational creativities

One of the bespoke creative learning projects devised by Aston Collective in the West Midlands Creativity Collaborative was 'School Voyagers', wherein historical and localised knowledge played a pivotal role in shaping creative expressions and interactions. The school in question had three aspirations for their project. First, they sought a project grounded in their locality, which would enable learners to explore the surrounding neighbourhood. This was inspired by an Adventure Day for teachers (also devised by Aston Collective), which had recently taken place in a nearby town and provided teachers with first-hand experience of how a school's locality, history, and heritage beyond the classroom could be used as stimulus for creative teaching and learning. In describing the value of this approach, Aston Collective's Artistic Director stated, 'it is about using your city as a resource. Let's look at the place around us in a different way'. Second, they wanted creative learning to be allied to the term's topic, Explorers and Adventurers, with an emphasis on history and geography. Third, they hoped that the experience would offer valuable insight and inspiration to learners, and subsequently support their creative writing. Exploring the wider locality was an attempt to address learners' experiential gap, since 'our children do not have as many wider-world life experiences as we have a lot of families in poverty' (Teacher).

In response to these needs, Aston Collective invited learners to become explorers and adventurers first-hand: they engaged in 'imaginary exploration, geocaching, finding out about explorers, planning an expedition, [and] designing flags' (Teacher). Learners created their own geocaches that, while formed of physical matter, carried affective qualities (Bennett 2010) since they determined where the adventure would continue next. Learners were able to play at being explorers

and dwell in the excitement of their unchartered voyage, while simultaneously drawing on their shared histories to create mini pamphlets with drawings of their school, family, favourite toys, and local landmarks. This interplay was valued by a teacher who noted, 'sessions have given value in terms of valuing feelings and experiences, drawing on imagined and real aspects of children's lives' (Teacher).

Building on the idea of forging social connections through materials, the project culminated in a rocket launch in the park to contact extra-terrestrial life. The rich situational and multisensory dimensions at play were captured in our research fieldnotes:

> the park becomes an exciting site of a rocket launch and helps to emphasise this important occasion. After the launch, as learners dash around excitedly on the search for geocaches, I wonder if the feeling of grass beneath their feet adds to the experience and helps them to embody their roles as explorers and voyagers. Their playground is mainly concrete, so perhaps this organic matter is adding something special. […] As the park is a large open space and it is a windy, showery day, everyone is more exposed to the elements. This adds another dimension to the adventure: learners huddle around each other and stare up at the sky, possibly imagining the voyagers before them who would have also braved the elements.

Here, learners' interconnectedness with new terrain and meteorological forces larger than themselves (Ulmer 2017) provided a creative learning experience that diverged from bounded and static classroom spaces. Exploring the surrounding and shifting environment – including the sounds, rhythms, grass, wind, and trees – fostered new relations between humans and local ecologies, therefore dismantling normative hierarchies which centre bodies (Braidotti 2013). As Murris (2020) states, 'posthumanism invites resisting putting the human at the centre of knowledge production, data creation and analysis, and challenges the idea that intelligence is in the human only' (61). In this example, the experience of engaging with nature extended learners' creative encounters and deepened connections to their surroundings.

Analysing these transformative educational practices through a posthuman lens highlighted the crucial role of active engagement with the local natural environment. Consequently, the school ecosystem evolved from a mere educational setting into a living canvas for creative expressions rooted in local spaces. As teachers and learners delved into historical and self-invented stories of voyagers, they forged 'agentic assemblages' (Bennett 2010, 23–24) involving humans, spatial and environmental responses, narratives, and shared histories. This bridged the typical division between classroom and local community and deepened participants' comprehension of co-constructed knowledge. The dynamic, collaborative approach questioned traditional roles and power structures in the classroom, using aspects of the more-than-human world to inform learning. These interactions therefore redefined the classroom as an interconnected space where creativity emerged from the interplay of humans, habitats, and histories.

Conclusions

Barad (2007) states that it is 'our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into every new possibility for living justly' (x). A posthuman perspective upon creativities moves beyond the limitations of current creativity frameworks employed in primary schools and opens up possibilities for more inclusive, ethical, and diverse ways of becoming. As demonstrated by the work of Oscott Theatre, creative collaborations in the classroom can foster multimodal, embodied, sensory, non-verbal, and equitable interactions. Furthermore, projects such as School Voyagers led by Aston Collective have the potential to enhance creative teaching and learning through resonance with local history and environmental situatedness.

In contrast to existing models of creativity that trace creative processes and outcomes from an individualist and anthropocentric perspective (Lubart 2001; Sprague and Parsons 2012), posthuman insights into the West Midlands Creativity Collaborative illustrate the intra-active nature of creativities. In addition to the five creative habits of mind outlined by the framework adopted in the *Durham Commission on Creativity and Education* (2019) – inquisitive, imaginative, persistent,

collaborative, and disciplined – this approach embraces creativities expressed through alternative modalities. It celebrates the playful creativities of learners' imaginative becomings with beanbags, scarves, and chairs; it respects the silent creativities of the tentative, watchful learners; and it challenges the conventional, indoor creativities of the classroom with the expansive, outdoor creativities of the wider world.

In doing so, the posthuman lens confronts approaches that seek to capture and measure creativity through universal assessment criteria (Treffinger et al. 2002) or standardised pedagogies such as 'I teach you, you teach it back' or 'no hands questioning' (ACE 2019, 67). Although this may complicate teachers' implementation of creative methods in the classroom, this article explains how collaboration between experienced creative practitioners and classroom teachers can facilitate novel and engaging creative encounters without recourse to restrictive frameworks or linear models. In this way, posthumanism validates affective and situational dimensions of learners' creativities that may not otherwise be captured.

As a result of the West Midlands Creativity Collaborative, significant shifts are already occurring in schools' practices. Teachers across the academy trust are increasingly incorporating non-verbal forms of communication into their pedagogical approaches, acknowledging the importance of embodied and sensory experiences in fostering creativity. In recognition that 'the curriculum in its current iteration stunts creativity' (Teacher), frameworks are being reworked to acknowledge and accommodate affective and situational creativities, with a growing emphasis on moving learning beyond the confines of the classroom and into the wider world. A newfound appreciation of the value of creativity within the curriculum has led to 'opportunities for sharing good practice between schools' (Teacher), and time and resources have been allocated to equip staff to overcome reservations around diverse creative modalities:

> the child-led learning … that's something that would scare me, to just think, 'right, I'm going to start with this and we'll just see where it goes', because, you know, I'm a planner and like to have things in my head and an idea of where I want to steer them. (Teacher)

Importantly, these changes are not only being initiated by teachers but are also being embraced by learners, who are actively engaging with and valuing everyday affective and situational creativities as integral components of their learning experiences:

> at the start, it was … [learners] kind of just didn't really know what they were being asked to do at all. And it's really the opposite now […] [they engage] with ultra-confidence, to the point where we have to watch their behaviour sometimes now! (Teacher)

These transformations therefore have an influence reaching far beyond the project, with fundamental implications for shaping schools' approaches to creativity.

Through recognising the complexity of all things that come to matter in the classroom – as the academies and creative organisations have done in the West Midlands Creativity Collaborative – we believe it is possible for creative pedagogies and practices to accommodate and celebrate learners' diverse needs, modes of expression, and ways of being. As Bresler (2018) notes, inclusive collaboration requires awareness of and sensitivity towards individual needs and divergences. This transformative, posthuman outlook upon creativities in the classroom is not only imperative for schools in England but on an international scale. Without such considerations in educational practice and policy, many learners' creativities will remain unseen, unheard, and unacknowledged.

Note

1. For the purposes of confidentiality, names of schools, organisations, and participants have been anonymised.

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