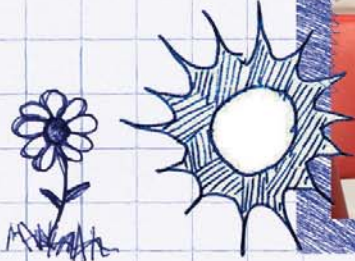


# RULES of engagement

Planning a creative curriculum? Chris Quigley offers pointers on the developmental process and how to make your hard work a success in the classroom...



It's striking how many different interpretations exist for the concept 'the creative curriculum'. In some schools it means topics or themes, in others it means asking children what they want to learn. Critics of the so-called creative curriculum dismiss it as 'woolly' and lacking in rigour – a step back to the 1970s. Supporters of it say it's the best way to engage and enthuse children in the learning process.

Over the past 30 years we've flipped between topics and stand-alone subjects. This has brought with it massive planning and workload issues for teachers. Each change makes the curriculum look very different, but are outcomes for children any better? This article looks at the benefits of using creative approaches to build a curriculum that meets the requirements of the statutory curriculum, raises standards and engages and enthuses children.

As a starting point we need a clear definition of what is meant by a creative curriculum. In his report to government, *Creativity – all our futures*, Sir Ken Robinson defined creativity as purposeful, imaginative activity with value. If we adjust this definition for the curriculum, then we could propose a definition of the creative curriculum as one that:

- Has clear educational purpose
- Is delivered with imagination
- Has measurable educational value

This definition gives three steps to take us through the process of curriculum development.



## Educational Purpose What do we need to teach?

Rather than subjects driving the curriculum, it's the needs of children that should determine the emphasis. It's important that children learn what's in the statutory curriculum, but most teachers know that children need much more than this. Balancing children's needs with the statutory curriculum will always be a challenge, but instead of the two acting in opposition we can ensure the content of the curriculum meets the needs of children and fulfils statutory requirements. To do this, establish some key 'drivers' for your school.

Drivers are the things that will shape the statutory curriculum. They should relate to:

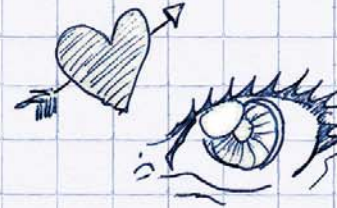
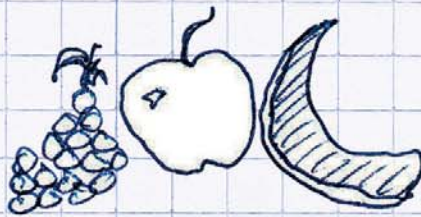
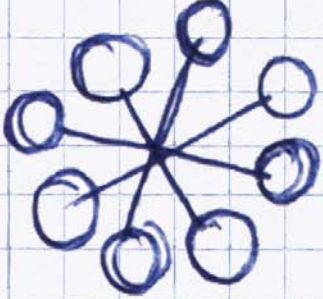


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- The needs of your children
- The needs of your community
- The values of your school
- The location of your school

Examples of drivers may be enterprise skills, environmental issues, personal and social development, communities or spiritual and moral development. Whatever you decide, they reflect the needs of your children and what you believe is right for them. These drivers will appear as headings in your planning for every topic in every year group. Establishing drivers doesn't mean that you will dismiss any parts of the curriculum. They help you to prioritise content.





**What is statutory?**

The statutory curriculum – what we have to cover in our schools – is set out in curriculum 2000. For each subject there is a breadth of study and a programme of study. The breadth of study is the coverage or entitlement part of the curriculum. This needs to be divided up across each key stage so that all aspects are covered at some point. It does not require repetition, but schools may choose to repeat some aspects if they wish. The programme of study comprises the essential knowledge, skills and understanding within subjects. It does require repetition, as it's this part of the curriculum that leads to progress. We will look at this part of the statutory curriculum when planning for measurable educational value.

Subject	continuous objectives	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Geography	<p>An environmental issue caused by a change in the environment and attempts to manage the environment sustainably.</p> <p>Study at a range of scales: Local, regional and national.</p> <p>Study a range of places beyond immediate locality (e.g. UK, Europe).</p> <p>Carry out fieldwork investigations outside the classroom.</p>	A locality in the UK.	A locality in a country that is less economically developed.	Water and its effects on landscapes and people, including: the physical features of rivers or coasts and the processes of erosion and deposition that affect them.	How settlements differ and change, including: why they differ in size and character and an issue arising from change in land-use.
History etc.					

**Creating a curriculum map**

A curriculum map can be created on paper or online (an online planner is available at [chrisquigley.co.uk](http://chrisquigley.co.uk)). The example shows how you may choose to set it out to ensure that all the statutory breadth of study is included. Before creating this curriculum map, you need to have chosen your curriculum drivers. Divide the statutory content into continuous and specific objectives. Specific objectives are the ones given to a particular year group or class. Continuous objectives are those that reflect the drivers of your curriculum or if the wording of the objective suggests lots of repetition. In doing this you're starting with the needs of your children and then shaping the National Curriculum around them.

Once you have a curriculum map, you have defined the educational purpose of your curriculum. Now is the time to begin considering how it will be delivered.







### 3 Allow time and space

If we are to provoke lines of enquiry, then children need space and time to follow them.

- ☒ Try planning for about half of the time you expect your plan to last.
- ☒ Try to allow time for children to explore their chosen lines of enquiry.



### 4 Be Flexible

Don't let timetables get in the way, especially at the 'launch' of a theme.

- ☒ Try collapsing the timetable at the beginning of a theme.
- ☒ Try to hook the interest of children and secure their commitment through a dramatic start.
- ☒ Try to pull the theme together at the end.



#### STEP 2

### Imagination

The planning for how the curriculum is to be delivered is key to engaging and inspiring children. We will now explore a thematic approach to planning and how to ensure that all the skills that the children need to acquire are covered.

#### Principles for creative themes

When planning your creative themes it's useful to keep certain principles in mind. These are the four that I like to use. Whether you use these principles or others of your own, they can be used to assess your themes once they've been created in order to ensure the consistency of principles across the school.

#### 1 Make it real

The more real the learning experience, the more likely it is that children will engage.

Try to make the theme real to children – it should not be abstract or too far removed from their experience. If something is based in the past, for example, try to think of the legacy it has left and start with that.

Try a stimulus of some description: a visit, visitors, artefacts, books, videos, situations, plays, etc. The wider the range of stimuli, the more likely it is that children will engage with the theme.

#### 2 Provoke

By planning a 'skeleton' theme based on our curriculum map, we ensure educational purpose, but the content needs also to be steered by children.

We need to provoke children into taking an interest in both what we've planned for them, and related things that they find interesting along the way. This is not the same as asking children what they would like to learn. When children don't know what they want to learn or what they can't do, it can be a pointless exercise. Asking children what they want to learn also assumes that they can articulate it. Most worryingly, though, asking children what they want to learn may lead to a situation that keeps children in a world that they've already experienced and not into the new worlds teachers can take children based on their needs rather than their wants. Having said this, we do want children to feel part of the process. Give lots of provocation in order to stimulate their interest and imagination, and allow children to steer rather than lead learning.

- ☒ Try to use a stimulus at the beginning of the theme to provoke lines of enquiry from the start.
- ☒ Try to allow the children's enquiries to steer the theme's direction.
- ☒ Try to respond to lines of enquiry that come up later in the theme – not all children will be provoked at the same time.

#### STEP 3

### Planning for measurable educational value

Some schools make a mistake in thinking that planning a purposeful and engaging curriculum will raise standards. It won't. It will ensure the content is right and that children are engaged. Another step is needed – that is to plan for what you want children to accomplish as a result of this purposeful and engaging curriculum.

#### Planning for subject key skills

Planning for the breadth of study in the National Curriculum has been addressed by creating your curriculum map. The next step is to ensure that the programme of study is not only covered, but also repeated to a progressively higher standard so that children make progress. This can turn out to be a difficult process because each subject has a very large programme of study and the National Curriculum level descriptors are largely unhelpful to teachers who are not subject experts.

I've summarised the programme of study into key skills. These are the essential subject skills children need. There are no more than five key skills in each subject, which means they can be repeated many times. To ensure progression, I've shown standards success criteria from level 1 to 5 of the National Curriculum.

