

Evidence of Impact
Case Studies

Embedding and Sustaining Creative Schools

**creative
schools**

AN INITIATIVE BY:

FORM.
building a state of creativity

Embedding and sustaining Creative Schools

We asked principals, deputies and program coordinators to reflect on the impact of FORM's Creative Schools program, and the challenges of embedding and sustaining its impact in their schools.

Interviews with school leaders capture how the program provides a license for staff and students to think differently, promoting metacognition and enriching memories of schooling. They also reference its positive impact on children, teachers and broader school cultures. Notably, the impact also extends to academic outcomes, with improvements in NAPLAN results as well as increased student engagement and enhanced student voice.

The school leaders we interviewed describe how Creative Schools has become a catalyst for nurturing creativity, prompting schools to embed creative capabilities from the earliest years. They also emphasise the need for scalability and sustainability, with considerations for embedding creative learning across the school, supporting staff, and fostering student agency.

Leaders are thinking strategically about how to maximise the focus on creative learning across the whole school. The creative habits are being integrated into reporting, strategic plans, and overall school communication strategies, reflecting a commitment to making creativity an inherent part of school fabric.

Overall, the leaders express gratitude for the joy of teaching and learning that Creative Schools has restored.



Rethinking pedagogy

After only one year in the program, **Karina Meldrum**, Principal and **Amanda Fletcher**, Deputy Principal at **Winthrop Primary School** share their insights about rethinking their pedagogical model in the light of their Creative Schools experience:

“There have been high participation rates in both classes. Everyone is getting involved. The children and teachers are really loving it because the projects link to the real world. Creative Schools is being embedded into our whole school direction. We see it as more than just a program that sits in isolation. It is linked to other goals for the school. We’re looking at rethinking pedagogy and how we are teaching. We have been working with a play expert and this fits in well to that focus.

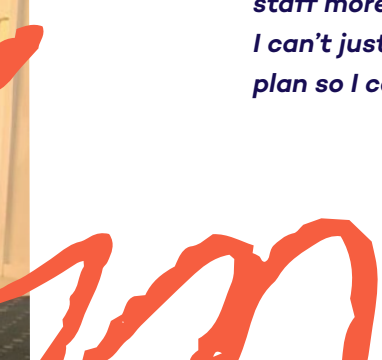
As school leaders we are picking out the good bits of the program that can be shared to impact the culture and vision statement. Student agency is a big focus for us. We want other teachers to get on board and see agency and creativity as adding another opportunity for enrichment for our students in addition to the academic, STEM and music that our students already experience.”

Keeping staff thriving

Janice Cuculoska, Principal at **Camboon Primary School** reflects on the benefits the program holds for teachers, and wonders how they might continue to partner with creative practitioners once the school is no longer part of the Creative Schools program.

“The staff who have been part of the program are thriving. I have teachers fighting over who will do the project. I’m still working out how to embed this across the school and share this with teachers who have not been part of the creative school program. We already work collaboratively, but I think the creative practitioner is the gold in Creative Schools because they bring new perspectives and ideas. It’s the creative practitioners that makes the program work. Having a creative practitioner to challenge our thinking is really vital.

So I am thinking about how we can keep this going when we can no longer be involved in Creative Schools. How do we keep it going but make it even better? I’m also wondering whether Creative Schools can help us with gradual release model to assist us to keep this going without perhaps the same involvement and support we get as a school in the program. I’m thinking about whether there are creatives in our community that we could partner with. I’m also thinking about how I can give the staff more time for collaborative planning because ultimately it needs to be funded, I can’t just expect them to stay after school so I’m going to write it into our business plan so I can put the money aside for this.”



Creative skills are important all the time

Dr Steven Laing is a former academic lecturer at Edith Cowan University with a PhD in Microbiology as well as widespread business experience. For the past six years he has been working as a Science and Mathematics teacher at **Clarkson Community High School**, committed to make a difference in the lives of under-privileged children. Steven initially got involved with Creative Schools as project teacher and then went on to take up the role of Creative Schools coordinator, supporting other teachers participating in the project and looking for opportunities to amplify the impact of the program across the school. He shares his some of his reflections.

“The tyranny of the curriculum means we often fear spending time on the things that really matter. We feel we need permission to do stuff outside the curriculum, but it made all the difference in my class last year to invest time in developing habits of learning. During Creative Schools last year, I got more work done in three science lessons per week lessons than I would normally do in four lessons. Spending one lesson per week on developing creative habits of learning led to a net gain in learning time, because the students were more receptive to the learning, and they acquired better skills for learning. We focused on building their creative skills of collaboration, inquisitiveness, discipline, imagination and persistence.

The students struggle with the open-endedness of the tasks, but they really enjoy the lessons and they grow from it. Last year I conducted a pivot engagement survey pre and post the program with the students. There was a huge difference in engagement for my Creative Schools class in comparison to other classes which could be attributed to the Creative Schools learning program. For our public school review the team really drilled down into this data and could really see the positive impact of creative learning.

When the creative practitioner facilitates the activities with the class, the teacher can get involved too, which breaks down barriers. They start seeing you as a human. When you run the activities yourself then you can't necessarily do that. My Creative Schools class changed from my least to my most favourite class.

We are also planning some Creative Schools professional learning for the whole school next year, including presentations from the four teachers who have already done the program. Other teachers know about the program, but they don't know it yet. We want to embed the language of creative habits across the school and then we can build creative learning activities into our curriculum from year 7, 8, 9 onwards. These creative skills are important all the time.”



Creative Schools – a gift to schools

John Burke, Principal at **Bob Hawke College**, reflects on how Creative Schools has helped to advance strategic priorities in a new school and the challenge to scale the impact throughout a large school.

“Creative Schools gives a licence to staff and students to think a bit differently. It is lovely to see the students show the metacognition of the creative skills and how it impacts their learning. Memories of schooling are not around the maths lesson, but the rich learning experiences like these. Another 280 students in the year group have been impacted through the program this year. The challenge for us is to scale it to involve all classes.

As a new school, valuing creativity it is one of the important things for us to nurture in children. We have written creativity into our business plan. Creative Schools has helped us to consolidate the language of creative learning through the school. We have changed our reporting to parents in terms of Attitude, Behaviour and Effort (ABE) to include creative learning in the ABE reporting. If you’re going to report on it, you need to teach it somewhere. That is smart accountability.

The vibe between creatives and teachers is exceptional. The teachers are modelling collaboration to the children. For our teachers it is not a revolution of teaching practice but an evolution of their thinking of how to embed creativity. It adds another layer of complexity and thinking in the way they do things. Creative Schools fits into the Quality Teaching Strategy work at Department for Education. We need to talk about it across the system and show how creative learning fits within the Teaching for Impact areas. Creative Schools has just been such a great gift in our school.”



A lasting impact on the fabric of the school

Kristy Watson, Principal at **Clarkson Community High School** can see the value of a whole-of-school Creative Schools approach. Applying creative thinking herself, she reflects on the programs impact on her own school community over the past two years and identifies opportunities to scale the impact within and beyond her school to the wider educational community:

“We can see the value of a whole school Creative Schools approach. I saw it from the data. One of the smartest things we did was having data-informed people involved in the program in the first year. The deliberate teaching of the skills for learning are so beneficial to enable better future learning for them. Our students come to school to us without those skills; they are the preconditions for learning. Spending the time on developing them explicitly is so valuable.

A key goal for us is breaking the cycle of poverty so our students can leave with choice and agency. Teaching student the creative habits helps us to do that. The creative learning activities help to build safety for students and teachers to take creative risks. Different challenges exist for students in different demographic contexts. Students in both high and low socio-economic areas can be risk averse, but for different reasons. Building that environment for safe risk taking is really valuable. Our kids generally don't take a lot of risks in their learning. It is not always socially safe to do so. Seeing the impact across learning areas has been amazing.

Conversations with teachers about what is happening in classrooms have been enlightening. It is not perfect but there is progress. In High School, having the conversations with other teachers have shown they can see a shift in the students involved in the program, and that was observed by the non-Creative Schools teachers. Seeing the skills transfer to different contexts is really important and quite exciting. The data shows it makes a difference.

We now need to consider sustainability; how can we make creative learning an embedded part of our school? We are considering how the creative habits can be linked to our classroom observation checklist and mapping it into the curriculum planning.

Creative Schools has left a lasting impact on the fabric of the school. Creative Schools is now seen as a pivotal part of what we do in our school's strategic plan. We are now planning our whole communication strategy around how we position ourselves as a school. We are defining why would a student would want to come to Clarkson – because we develop Creative Thinkers.”



Creatively brave leadership for the sake of our children

Sue Waterhouse, Principal at **Merriwa Primary School** has been involved in Creative Schools since a pilot of the program was launched in 2018. She reflects on the program's impact has had in her school community on student voice, NAPLAN results, student engagement, teacher practice and her own leadership journey:

"We were part of the pilot program of Creative Schools. I was highly sceptical at first. I thought we honestly don't have time for this creative stuff. We have to get on with teaching them reading and writing explicitly and give them building blocks for the future. We started in Year 6. It was a low risk, after their last Naplan with us, and then I realised this IS what they need to succeed in the future. These are not soft skills; they are real skills. Once I understood the value of the program I became more brave and we introduced it in Year 5 and Year 4. I then realised we need to embed these creative capabilities from the youngest ages, so we went down to Year 1 and now Pre-Primary. I've realised it's better to invest in the kids when they are younger to develop their skills and habits of mind so they can use these as they progress through the primary school."

Our kids come to us with no vocabulary and then I hear them explain the Creative Habits. What a joy. I had forgotten as a leader the beautiful inquisitiveness of a child. Do we crush that as a system? We need to hold onto that. I recently received a letter from a Year 6 class: "To Mrs Waterhouse, thanks for making learning fun."

We didn't imagine it was going to increase the capacity for student voice in our school. That was an unexpected outcome, but it has flourished because they learn thinking and reflecting on their learning and they learn to articulate that. E.g. our senior Aboriginal group of students recently presented to our Board and School Review. An unexpected benefit because they see themselves now as having a voice through learning to reflect on their learning. This is happening in many areas across the school we could have never imagined."





"The most exciting thing is that since we joined Creative Schools, our NAPLAN results have gone through the roof. It was never detrimental to academic learning: it enhanced it. We have seen a huge uptake in engagement, skills and academic learning. The children have discovered their voice and can articulate their thinking. System-wide we still have people needing to be convinced that creative learning matters. We can use the General Capabilities as a framework to embed the Creative Habits.

Apart from NAPLAN steadily going up and up, our attendance is above that of similar schools and above similar and public schools for Aboriginal students. Student Voice has become a feature of what we do at Merriwa and it is showing in a higher than expected ratio of student numbers in student leadership roles at Butler and Clarkson High Schools. Our Public School Review has rated Merriwa Primary School as exceptional, with a five year return. Creative Schools has played a significant part in this success.

Creative Schools has also made a big impact on our teachers. We have many graduate teachers. I have learnt how different our younger teachers are. Initially they needed the structure and security of Explicit Instruction. Our Pre-primary teachers then came to us and said: Phonics and Direct Instruction are important, but getting a bit boring on its own. Where is the joy in learning? I saw the light going on for them, so I gave them Creative Schools. They were ready for it. Seeing the teachers taking it on so bravely has been wonderful. The Habits of Mind in Creative Schools gives teachers a structure for teaching the Critical and Creative Thinking General Capabilities. Our kids have benefited. It has given the joy back to learning. I'm just really grateful that they got their joy of teaching back and our kids have benefited. I hope we have saved them from a career of worksheets.

We now have a committee of teachers who have done Creative Schools to support other teachers who might be interested in learning creative teaching strategies. They can share the warmups and Habits of Mind. We will do this slowly though as I am mindful of workload. We are also looking at how we can spread it in our local area beyond our school. The involvement in the program of our local high school, Clarkson, is a gift. If we can't get a creative practitioner, can we get a Year 11 or 12 student from our local high school leading activities for us?

This journey with Creative schools has had one of the biggest impacts on me as an educational leader. I have learned a lot from this partnership. I have learned that we don't always know the answers, but we have to keep going and we have to be creatively brave for the sake of our children. I don't know the full impact of what it has done for our students, and much of it can't be measured by traditional system measurement, but I know that the outcomes for in our students will be long lasting."



THE IMPACT OF CREATIVE SCHOOLS

Laura Motherway,
Strategic Creative Learning Manager,
FORM Building a State of Creativity,

with

Mathilda Joubert,
Director of Excellence and Innovation
Sheridan Institute of Higher Education,
Creative Schools Evaluator

For more information please contact:
learning@form.net.au



THE CREATIVE SCHOOLS PROGRAM WAS INITIATED AND IS MANAGED BY FORM: BUILDING A STATE OF CREATIVITY.
IT IS PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND IS FINANCIALLY SUPPORTED BY THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

**creative
schools**

AN INITIATIVE BY:
FORM.
building a state of creativity

© FORM 2025. All rights reserved.

Copyright for imagery and written content in this publication is held by FORM
Building a State of Creativity or the individual contributing writers, where
applicable. Every effort has been made to adhere to best practice ICIP protocols.