The growth of ‘creativity in education’ in England has been closely connected with the arts and culture. The ‘permissive’ 1960s, typically cited as initiating ‘creativity in education’, saw arts activity flourish, new freedoms for schools, educational experiments initiated and espoused child-centred, individualised learning. However, decades earlier, as mass compulsory education emerged, the significance of learning, and especially making, through practising art forms and feeding ‘creative instinct’ was recognised as critical. (Ackland 1913).

Callaghan’s call for a re-balancing of education from an over-emphasis on ‘equip[ping] children...for a lively, constructive, place in society’ towards one ‘fit[ting] them to do a job of work’ (1976), led Robinson (1982) to powerfully position the arts in education as economically significant. The later ‘All our Futures’ report (2000) stimulated this process of understanding and representing the complex value of creativity and culture in education, through economic, technological, as well as social and personal lenses.

Sharpened by economic decline, the demand for increased (elite) ‘cultural production’ (Bourdieu 1993) by ‘creative industries’ has fed the marketability of creativity and its representation as a set of transferable skills e.g. ‘adaptability’, ‘imaginative thinking’, ‘connecting’, ‘risk-taking’, ‘collaboration’, ‘challenge’, ‘discipline’, ‘grit’. Identifying component parts and preference of particular skills might be considered a sanitisation of the chaos natural to creativity - attractive to policy makers and schools focused upon achievement scores (Runco 2008;187). However it ignores creativity’s holistic value and the need to generate conditions for situating its growth (Wallas 1926; Csikszentmihalyi 1996). Recent de-investment in publicly-funded arts and arts in schools which challenges the development of diverse cultural production reflective of multi-cultural England appears significant.

Locating the educational discourse about ‘creativity’ against its cultural backdrop foregrounds its contingent nature and allows for a more detailed consideration of its internal contradictions. Some application of arts-based creativity in society has focused upon the conditions that feed creativity’s dynamic process and recognise its diverse, situated, complexity (Landry 1995; Cunningham 2013). This paper considers the implications of such approaches for education.

Ackland (1913) ‘Report of the Consultative-committee on Practical work in secondary schools’


Cunningham, J. (2013) ‘Knitting the arts and society together’


Landry, C. and Bianchini, F (1995) The Creative City

Robinson (1982) The Arts in schools


NACCCE (2000) ‘All our Futures’

Wallas, G. (1926) The Art of Thought