

# Everyday Creative Activism

A provocation by Dr Katherine Evans for the [International Arts and Imagination Network](#), 25 September 2025.

When Penny asked me to provide a provocation for today's event I was instantly drawn to the notion of *everyday creative activism*. I want to start with a quote from Rob Hopkins, who encourages us to “Imagine that going to school was replete with moments that felt as though they were bursting with possibility” (Hopkins, 2019, p98). I believe everyday creative activism is essential in fostering such moments. Creative activism has been described as the act of taking learning outside of the classroom, thinking about learning happening everywhere and considering learning as emergent within spaces of possibility (Hay et al, 2020). There are powerful examples of this form of creative activism. The Forest of Imagination for example, a ‘site of imaginative, nature-based installations co-designed with artists, schools, families and the local community’ (FOI, 2025), makes learning, creativity and imagination visible on the streets of Bath.

Experiences such as the Forest of Imagination are powerful examples of what is possible when we embrace co-creation, imagination and speculation as essential elements of learning. To draw on Rob Hopkins again, these spaces ask ‘What if’, rather than ‘What is’. So, we have these powerful examples of creative spaces, spaces that foster this attitude of ‘What If’, but unfortunately these spaces are the exception, not the rule. We might see these spaces as large scale forms of creative activism – *the unapologetic and public prioritisation of creativity, in all its forms*. But what happens in the more everyday classroom spaces, in everyday, mainstream schools. In spaces that can be structured and controlled by narrow curriculum frameworks and high stakes accountability measures. Where can imagination and creativity emerge in these spaces?

The barriers can feel insurmountable – the expectations of curriculum coverage and the seemingly endless drive of progress towards fixed and normative outcomes of learning can act to restrict the practice of teachers – teaching only towards a fixed view of knowledge and progress that has been marked out as valuable by a select group of policy makers. Education in these contexts can often prioritise ‘quick fix’ teaching methodologies (in England, the dominance of Systematic Synthetic phonics in the early years is an example of this) and also linear trajectories that leave little room to deviate from the accepted, and acceptable path. This is where, I believe, ‘everyday creative activism’ is so important. Everyday Creative Activism is about the small moments, the seemingly small decisions and choices made by teachers in classrooms everyday that act to make space for imagination and creativity. This could be as simple as asking the children, ‘What do you want to know?’ And ‘How do you want to find out?’ - *and taking their answers seriously!* It could be actively teaching children to question what is taken for granted in the knowledge based curricular structures that shape their education – to disrupt the litany of western, white male artists, composers, authors and innovators that children are introduced to in their Primary years. The crucial characteristic of Every Day Creative Activism is that through everyday acts, something is opened – a space of possibility is created, however small.

These may sound like simple things – to offer children genuine choice, to create a culture of questioning and critical analysis from the earliest stages of schooling, to prioritise diversity in the historical and cultural narratives that children are introduced to within their education. The barriers to this form of everyday creative activism are, however, significant. Barriers of time, resources and curricular restrictions (driven by assessment processes) create very real restrictions on teachers. Not to mention the cognitive load that teachers are expected to manage these days – the capacity to do things differently, to take a risk (however small), can feel too much for teachers already under significant pressure to perform and conform. Teachers need conditions of empowerment, a community that supports them in their everyday creative decision making, in the minor moments of activism that can make such a difference.

For some, they may be lucky enough to have this in the leadership structures of their schools – in the educational spaces that foster creativity and risk taking as part of teacher development. There are many powerful examples of schools that put genuine creativity at the heart of everything they do. For others however, this support is sadly absent. To ask children what they want to learn and how they want to find out – and to take this seriously - can feel like a genuinely risky move. To teach, not knowing what the outcome might be...to value speculation, questioning, possibility – the risk that what is learned may not pay into wider accountability measures, can feel impossible.

It is in these contexts, that moments of everyday creative activism become so important, and my question today is, how do we support *all* teachers to find space for these in their day to day practice? How do we carry the creative ethos of events such as the Forest of Imagination into the practice of every teacher, in every school – especially for those who may not get to experience these events first hand. How do we create a community that reaches out into every classroom, every staff room, that helps teachers to find that confidence to create their own, everyday, moments of activism?

For further information, please contact [Professor Penny Hay](#).

**Next IAIN seminar:** 3 February 2026.