

## **Creativity through Mindfulness:**

### **The Arts and Wellbeing in Education (AWE) Professional Learning Programme**

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**Abstract:** This article uses findings from a case study of an arts/education professional learning programme in Wales to construct a definition of creativity that reflects on and contributes to debates around the concept, and its value within education. The programme, *Arts and Wellbeing in Education (AWE)* focused on supporting school teachers' wellbeing through creative practice. The research comprised a participatory methodology that sought to explore the circulating discourse around the key concepts of creativity and wellbeing in order to identify how the team leading the programme conceptualised the value of creativity, and how this was enacted. The findings point to a notion of creativity that is an inclusive, *carnival* experience that may improve wellbeing through mindful approaches to creative practice.

**Keywords:** Arts education, wellbeing, school teachers, creative learning, participatory research, poststructuralism

## **Introduction: Regional Arts and Education Networks**

In 2015, the Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales published, *Creative Learning through the Arts—An Action Plan for Wales* (Welsh Government 2015). The plan was developed in response to a research report authored by Professor Dai Smith (2013) and commissioned by Welsh Government, entitled *Arts in Education in the Schools in Wales*. The report recommends increased opportunities for pupils and teachers to enjoy the arts and creativity. This includes the appointment of Arts Champions to work in schools on short- and medium-term projects, and a new framework to address the lack of relevant and cohesive professional learning opportunities for both teachers and arts practitioners. A lack which was also identified in *Successful Futures* (Donaldson 2015), otherwise referred to as the ‘Donaldson Review’ of the curriculum in Wales.

The professional learning programmes advocated in *Creative Learning through the Arts* (Welsh Government 2015) are currently being delivered through four, newly formed Regional Arts and Education Networks. The central aim of the Networks is to ‘increase and improve arts experiences and opportunities in schools’ (Network D internal document 2016: n.page). The Networks cover the same geographical regions as the four Regional Consortia, which combine and coordinate local education authority responsibilities across Wales. Each of the Networks appointed Arts Champions after a process of application. These are artist/educators delivering arts activity in schools ranging from practical lessons for pupils, through collaborative working with large-scale arts organisation and school networks, to professional learning for teaching staff.

## **The Arts and Wellbeing in Education (AWE) Professional Learning Programme**

Three of the Arts Champions appointed by Network D<sup>1</sup> worked together to deliver a training day for teachers which included elements from each of their specialisms. A small number of schools requested repeat visits as professional learning for the whole staff. As a result, the Challenge Advisors (members of staff who are responsible for school improvement initiatives) at the Regional Consortium recommended specific schools they felt would benefit from participating in a similar programme. In response to this charge based on the first training day, the Arts Champions developed the Arts and Wellbeing in Education (AWE)<sup>2</sup> programme, which they delivered as four, weekly, twilight sessions, lasting 60-90 minutes. All members of staff and volunteers at the selected schools were invited. The sessions were entitled Yoga and Mindfulness, Drawing with Mindfulness, Storytelling with Line, Clay and Plaster Casting along with Mark-Making with Sensory Stimuli and Calming Techniques. A qualified yoga instructor led the first session, and the Arts Champions each led one of the others. While the AWE programme was not designed as a school improvement initiative, the content and approach focused on supporting the wellbeing of staff through creative practice were considered by the Arts Champions and Regional Consortium to be beneficial during a period of school change. This essay explores how this group of Arts Champions conceptualised creativity and articulated this concept through the Arts and Wellbeing in Education (AWE) professional learning programme.

### **Professional Learning and the Arts**

The absence of Professional Learning (PL) opportunities relevant to arts education is not exclusive to Wales as such initiatives have been identified through research occurring in

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<sup>1</sup> Network D is a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of participants in line with the ethics approval received for this research

<sup>2</sup> Arts and Wellbeing in Education (AWE) is another pseudonym to protect the anonymity of participants in line with the ethics approval received for this research

other countries. Improved teacher training was called for in the *Henley Report, Cultural Education in England* (Henley 2012), and has been found lacking across Europe, North America and Asia-Pacific countries, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean (Wagner 2006). The identified lack refers not only to provision, but to an absence of quality in the opportunities provided (Wagner 2006), that have been attributed to a range of factors. One such factor is the need for cohesive strategy and policy. Across European countries, cohesion has been inhibited by the shared responsibility for arts education between two or more governmental departments (EACEA 2009; Henley 2012; Wagner 2006). For example, at the time of its writing, the *Henley Review of the curriculum in England—Cultural Education in England* (Henley 2012)—described the two, separate UK Government departments that were stakeholders and policy makers in arts education. The Department for Education held responsibility for curriculum education in the arts, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sports had responsibility for sector skills, and wider industry training. Art in schools was thereby divided from the arts as a sector and an industry (Henley 2012).

Arts education has also previously been side-lined, and included only under other, compulsory curriculum subjects. For example, dance is taught *within* Physical Education, and Creative Writing and Drama are taught *within* the English/Welsh curriculum. Furthermore, research across 30 European countries argues there is a hierarchy in the curriculum, whereby reading, writing and numeracy are prioritised (EACEA 2009). The same has been found in Australia, where literacy and numeracy exist at the top of the hierarchy, with the arts and humanities at the bottom (Ewing 2010). Moreover, research also identified a hierarchy *within* the arts, so that visual arts and music are prioritised over other art forms (EACEA 2009; Ewing 2010).

These hierarchies, along with rigid curricular structures, have meant that arts education in the UK, and particularly PL in arts education, have been overlooked in favour of what some might consider more pressing educational needs, such as literacy and numeracy. There is some evidence to suggest that learning in the arts and creativity may contribute to improvements in literacy and numeracy (e.g. Ruppert 2006). However, there is considerable debate over the benefits of arts education, and whether there is sufficient evidence to make any claims at all for the need for quality arts education (e.g. Cultural Learning Alliance 2011; Ewing 2010; Wagner 2006). This debate is mirrored in conceptualisations of creativity, including its role and perceived benefits within education. Exploring the definitions of creativity in relation to education would be beneficial in adding context to later discussions outlined in this essay.

### **Definitions of Creativity**

There exists a range of philosophical and theoretical standpoints that shape the application and definition of creativity within and outside of educational contexts, which is beyond the scope of this article. However, a number of key publications are worth referencing as they have resonance for the AWE programme. For example, in his 2013 report to Welsh Government, *Arts in Education in the Schools of Wales*, Smith defines creativity as, 'being open to the acquisition of new knowledge and innovative skills' (6).

Earlier, in 1999, the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education published *All Our Futures* (NACCCE 1999). The publication came in response to the 1997 UK Government White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*, which advocated for a broad approach to education that recognised the interests and abilities of children and young people. The report begins with a useful definition of creativity, often quoted within educational

contexts. Creativity, according to *All Our Futures* (NACCCE 1999), is imaginative, purposeful, original and of value in relation to these objectives. The authors emphasise the belief that creativity is ubiquitous—so *original* in this context refers to newness to the individual or group, as well as wider society.

Banaji, Burn and Buckingham (2010) describe nine rhetorics that summarise debates surrounding creativity, and enable us to understand how each use of creativity cross-refers while serving divergent socio-political aims. The nine rhetorics are as follows: creative genius; democratic and political creativity; ubiquitous creativity; creativity as a social good; creativity as economic imperative; play and creativity; creativity and cognition; the creative affordances of technology; and the creative classroom. These facets of creativity add support to Hall and Thomson's (2017) argument that creativity holds various meanings and is subject to perspective; it cannot be described as a singular concept. The rhetorics that Banaji et al (2010) describe are accessible and meaningful in the wider context of debates around creativity and the arts in education. Furthermore, they offer a structure within which the interpretations of creativity, articulated through the AWE programme, were positioned.

### **Mindfulness and the Arts**

There has been particular focus in research literature and teaching practice on the capacity of the arts to support and enhance pupil wellbeing (e.g. Karkou and Glasman 2004; McIntosh 2015; McLellan et al 2012; Nixon 2016). While there may be parallel arguments, many of these research studies focus on concepts of wellbeing for pupils, whereas the AWE programme centred on the creative arts as a means to support and improve teachers' wellbeing, specifically through practices of mindfulness. Mindfulness originates in Buddhist meditative practice and refers to purposefully and openly attending to one's immediate

experience in a way that is non-judgemental, calm and accepting of the present moment (Albrecht et al 2012; Kabat-Zinn 1994; Shapiro and Carlson 2009). Evidence has been building since the 1990s suggesting a link between mindfulness interventions and increased wellbeing and cognitive performance (Creswell 2017).

Wu and Wenning (2016) maintain that the mindfulness movement has gained particular strength from the perceived crisis of modern childhood, especially in the industrialised West. Mindfulness training has been used in the classroom to improve wellbeing and resilience, to reduce stress and enhance students' capacity for learning (e.g. Jennings and Siegel 2015; Zenner, Herrleben-Kurz and Walach 2014). Moreover, drawing on a study based in the United States, Patterson (2015) argues that art classes in teacher training can help promote and increase the role of mindfulness via art in school through activities focused on cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing. She (Patterson) deduces that the primary elements of mindfulness come from breath work, physical exercise and sensory activities, all of which are accessible through meaningful arts practice (2015). Of interest here is how each of the Arts Champions delivering the AWE programme sought to support teachers' wellbeing through workshops incorporating mindfulness, and how this was linked to creativity and creative practice.

## **Methodology**

My dataset for this study encompassed three distinct research activities generated between December 2017 and May 2018. The first dataset is an ascending model of discourse analysis (Foucault 1980), applied to documents relating to the formation and purpose of the case study Network along with and materials made available via the Network's website. The aim was to explore the relations between organisations, individuals and practices to reveal the

underlying structures that form the context. Moreover, this dataset endeavoured to give an indication of the ideological project informing and communicated through the Welsh Government's action plan, along with the related and resultant practices (Foucault 2002). Findings from this element of the analysis are published separately from the discussion here (Southern 2019).

Secondly, on two separate occasions I interviewed two of the AWE Arts Champions together at the same time. The interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, were semi-structured, audio-recorded, transcribed and coded for analysis. The first took place in January 2018 towards the beginning of the team's PL programme, and the second took place in May comprising a reflection activity and discussion of plans. Finally, I observed six workshop sessions delivered by the three Arts Champions. I was unable to observe the Yoga with Mindfulness session due to conflicting timetables. The observations followed a semi-structured framework adapted from the work of Spradley (1980) as well as LeCompte and Preissle (1993). My reflection processes were adapted from the work of Bogdan and Biklen (1992). At the first session I observed—Mark-Making with Sensory Stimuli—I was invited to take part and remained an active, participant observer throughout this and the following five sessions.

I applied a poststructural approach, using the work of Foucault (1980; 1991; 2000; 2002) and Žižek (2001; 2009), to analyse the interview transcriptions and observation notes focusing on the underlying power structures at work in the discourse surrounding the Arts Champions' conceptualisations of creativity. The data generated through this methodology is unavoidably subjective, due to the necessarily retroactive production of my observation notes.

### **The Arts and Wellbeing in Education (AWE) Workshops**



Findings were generated by coding the interview and observation data, which were grouped according to *a priori* themes--creativity, wellbeing and mindfulness. The following gives an overview of how notions of creativity, creative learning and arts education were articulated through each of the workshops and how this related to wellbeing.

**Drawing with Mindfulness.** The Drawing with Mindfulness session led by Liz<sup>3</sup> aimed to introduce school staff classroom activities, along with ways in which they could incorporate 'mindful creativity' (Liz) into their own lives. Liz expressed the opinion that the opportunity to quiet the mind of unhelpful, negative or overwhelming thoughts was intrinsic to creativity, and modelled this creativity through calm, considered actions, speech and pedagogy. Liz spoke about creativity as an action in and of itself, as opposed to being product-driven. After the session, we discussed her approach and wider debates around the value of creativity and how they have been linked to, for example, skills and the economy through creative industries. Liz explained that from her point of view, 'being creative is enough'. This assertion places the emphasis on notions of creativity as a social good (Banaji et al 2010). However, the use of mindful techniques implies the value here lies in this explicit link to wellbeing.

The workshop participants I observed spoke very little throughout the session, other than to comment on their enjoyment of activities, and to occasionally express their own lack of artistic ability. They may have been engrossed in their own mindful reflections. However, the minimal response to Liz's queries and suggestions could indicate some underlying tension or discomfort. The Arts Champions all firmly believed in the inclusive approach and the capacity of creative practice to enhance wellbeing. However, there was no direct

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<sup>3</sup> The names of the Arts Champions have been replaced with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity in line with the ethics approval granted for this research

evidence that participants experienced this as expected/described by the session leaders. Evaluation sheets were circulated at the end of sessions as a matter of course, but these were organised centrally by the Network and did not focus on perceived improvements in wellbeing. Instead, the questions centred on how useful and enjoyable they found the session, and whether they would consider using the skills and techniques in their own lessons, as well as some indications of further professional learning needs or desires.

**Storytelling with Line: Clay and Plaster Casting.** The aim of this session was to introduce arts-based skills and offer an opportunity for staff to reflect through the process, by producing a likeness of a meaningful place. Much like the Drawing session, this workshop was characterised by its accessibility. The session leader, Rachel, stressed the equipment was not ‘extravagant thing[s] that you can’t really get hold of, this specialist thing that you only have to go to this website to get’. During the interview, Catherine and Rachel spoke at some length about the need to ‘break down barriers’ for school staff who perhaps felt under-confident in arts practice, fearing that they lacked skill or would be unable to produce anything creative. Rachel spoke passionately about wanting to avoid the situation that she herself experienced during professional learning sessions, whereby participants were made to feel vulnerable by being taken out of their comfort zone and into an unfamiliar place. This vulnerability was exacerbated by a pedagogical approach that was didactic and which made her feel patronised and undervalued.

It was therefore important for AWE that the sessions took place in familiar classroom surroundings selected by the school. As Rachel explained, ‘when we walked into their space and we were concentrating on how they felt, their role within the school and how to empower them, and make them feel stronger in themselves. That’s not patronising, that’s care and consideration’. During the interview, Rachel also spoke about ‘a welcoming into a

world [...] that's already theirs; they just might not know that it exists', highlighting her belief that there was no hierarchy between those teaching creativity and those who were there to learn.

However, it is worth noting that although this may have been her intention, it was not always appreciated. One particular session I observed was characterised by an awkward, negative atmosphere, causing some disruption and tension, which Rachel talked freely about later. The workshops were understood as compulsory by staff. They had been suggested by the Consortium, attended by the Head Teacher and took place during scheduled staff meeting time to ensure that all staff members were available to attend. It is possible that the mindfulness in this instance felt rather enforced. During the session, Rachel tried to encourage conversation and sharing around how people felt, what they had made and what it meant to them. This was largely ignored or given one- or two-word answers.

There was also some resistance to the activities indicated by two or three members of the staff refusing to join in. One particularly vocal teacher explained repeatedly that she had done all this before, and advised colleagues that they should just watch children's art-based TV shows for classroom ideas, naming several by way of example. This was the second of the four intended programmes. The staff team had not attended the first, nor had the Head Teacher who sent his Deputy to explain the lack of attendance. The third and fourth sessions were later cancelled by the Head Teacher. In this instance, the 'care' that Rachel had hoped to show, and the subsequent prospect of improved wellbeing was not accepted as a positive, supportive opportunity.

**Mark-Making with Sensory Stimuli and Calming Techniques.** This workshop, led by Catherine, began with an introduction to some resources that were designed to encourage

mindfulness and calming techniques for pupils. The techniques centred on slowing breathing and pausing to reflect, which Catherine described as 'being mindful'. The session focused on the capacity of the arts to engender outcomes that fell within the broad scope of wellbeing, and, more specifically, for certain activities to generate certain responses. Catherine demonstrated some examples, such as using a Hoberman Sphere to teach breathing techniques and to encourage quiet, calm time when pupils are feeling anxious, overwhelmed or if tempers run high.

Each of the artistic skills/techniques were also designed to encourage conversation about how the activities made us feel, and we were encouraged to consider how we felt about the main lesson of the session, which was collaboration. The response to this call was limited, and the participants either remained silent when asked to collaborate on their paintings, or joked about how they were unwilling to share. The exception to this was the Acting Head Teacher, who remained upbeat throughout the session, responding positively to all suggestions from the Arts Champion.

Catherine believed in the capacity of creative practice to contribute to self-awareness, an understanding of the group dynamic, and to bring laughter and a sense of closeness to the group. However, this was not always evident. The outcomes of the session assumed a positive impact on wellbeing, and a sense of calm was anticipated/expected as a result of participation. All three Arts Champions expressed the opinion that engaging in creative practice in this inclusive manner would result in improved wellbeing. Yet, there was no measurement or assessment of creativity nor of its impact on the group's or any individual's wellbeing. When pressed, they offered their own, personal experiences as proof.

## **Discussion**

The following discussion focuses on the themes—definitions of creativity and wellbeing through mindfulness—that recurred throughout the observation and interview data

### **1. Creativity as a ‘Carnival’**

The approach of the AWE programme models the ‘ubiquitous creativity’ rhetoric identified by Banaji et al (2010: 29). The explanation of this rhetorical position refers to Anna Craft’s (2001) assertion that definitions of creativity in education tend to link creativity and imagination, suggesting that everyone has the potential for creativity. The AWE workshops were characterised by the ways in which the Arts Champions conceptualised inclusion. They each strived to make the workshops accessible and expressed the opinion that the teachers were entitled to be a part of the world of creativity and art-making, but perhaps needed some support in building the confidence and/or knowledge that would enable them to participate fully.

The parity of access advocated by Catherine, Rachel and Liz through the use of accessible materials, settings, language and the disruption of hierarchies based on job role, can be understood as establishing a group of peers, who are recognised (Fraser 2000) and therefore valued equally. However, a hierarchy still existed. The team were teaching mindfulness to participants selected by the Consortium and identified by Challenge Advisors as in need of support during school improvement initiatives. These were not self-selecting groups coming together.

The emphasis of the workshops was on the importance of *being* creative—of being productive in terms of expression but not product-driven. During the workshops and/or interviews, all three Arts Champions spoke about creativity as a process, as learning and as a state of being. Catherine explained how she believed these concepts function together: ‘these little areas are ready for you to access for your experience, rather than use the word

learning. When you're ready, you go in and experience it. And then process it. And then you're learning'.

The AWE experience as described by Catherine is reminiscent of the *carnavalesque* explored by Thomson, Hall, Jones and Sefton-Green (2012). The authors draw on Bakhtin's (1965/1984) theoretical discussion on the concept of *carnival*, which also provides a useful analogy for the experience of participating in the AWE programme. Thomson et al's (2012) *carnavalesque* refers to a productive interruption that arts practitioners employed to disrupt the 'default pedagogy' of the classroom and engage pupils in creative practice (12-13). For example, absurd humour, and activities that might be considered out of place in a 'typical' lesson, such as the storyteller who encouraged a class of children to 'speak like bees' for part of a workshop (Thomson et al 2012: 45), characterize this interventionist pedagogy. The arrival of the Arts Champions into the familiar classroom space, bringing bags of rosemary, or clay, disrupting traditional hierarchies and encouraging the teachers to breathe and reflect, represented a 'temporary liberation from prevailing truth and from the established order' (Bakhtin 1965/1984: 10).

Furthermore, the AWE team deliberately chose to create workshops that ran counter to the usual PL opportunities that they themselves had experienced. The care Rachel took, the invitation that Catherine extended, and Liz's assertion that 'creativity is enough' are examples of a disruption of the didactic, teacher-learner hierarchy that perhaps had been anticipated by the participants. The result of their disruptive presence aimed to create the new, if not unique, as Smith (2013) and NACCCE (1999) describe. However, there were tensions here, since the workshops took place in the very site of the established order, and participation had been directed by the Consortium via the Head Teacher, rather than freely, through personal choice. The very familiarity of the site that Rachel had hoped would

bring a sense of inclusive care, actually signified the authority that demanded the school (and by extension, the teachers) improve.

## **2. Wellbeing through Mindfulness**

The AWE workshops incorporated approaches to supporting eudemonic wellbeing (Tinkler and Hicks 2011) based on assumptions regarding the psychological needs of the individual, some of which were verified by the participants during conversation. The team all believed that creativity and arts practice were linked intrinsically to an individual's wellbeing; central to which, was the concept of mindfulness. The Arts Champions modelled what they described as a 'mindful' approach to their work and all explained, either during workshops or at interview, that this focus on practical, creative techniques combined with quiet reflection would result in the participants feeling a sense of calm and a positive improvement in wellbeing.

Slavoj Žižek (2001) offers us a more troubling reading of the use of mindfulness, which is explored in more detail by Arthington (2016). Žižek (2001) claims that, 'individualized adaptations of esoteric practices run the risk of diverting attention away from the larger structural issues, such as capitalist hegemony, neoliberalism and social engineering that might be the root causes for the problems that mindfulness practices purport to overcome' (n.pag.). In education, and schools in particular, the culture of performativity aimed at 'raising standards' currently predominates (Wu and Wenning 2016: 556). This is especially true in Wales where the Welsh Government's drive to improve standards articulated in the *National Mission for Education* (Welsh Government 2017) has been initiated, partly in response to the country's performance in international league tables such as PISA. The AWE programme participants are ostensibly being supported through this. However, the danger is that they are being further subjectified (Foucault 1991)

through the focus on mindful techniques that distract from the socio-political matter at hand.

This diversionary tactic can be recognised in the findings of some research enquiries that purport to show the benefits of mindfulness in the classroom. For example, it has been argued that introducing mindfulness skills early in life can promote social and emotional wellbeing and prevent development of 'maladaptive behaviour' (Bishop et al 2004: 230). This descriptor suggests an authoritative hierarchy of what is considered to be appropriate behaviour. The research does not examine the underlying socio-cultural or political context in which these children and young people are being coached into mindfulness, suggesting that it is their behaviour that is at fault, rather than their environment.

Arthington (2016) uses what he describes as a 'Foucauldian perspective' (87), drawing on theories discussed in *Power/Knowledge* (Foucault 1980) and *Technologies of the Self* (Martin et al 1998) to claim that mindfulness is being used as a technique for regulating individual subjectivity in a manner in line with neoliberalism. He (Arthington 2016) argues that, 'mindfulness represents a form of psychological power/knowledge which obscures political and socioeconomic perspectives on the factors underlying unhappiness and distress in contemporary capitalist society' (88).

This perspective raises questions for the AWE programme. While aiming to support teachers' wellbeing, are the Arts Champions actually instituting disciplinary structures in line with Foucault's (1980, 1991, 2000) theoretical notions of power? The schools participating in the AWE programme are singled out and declared in need of improvement by the consortium Challenge Advisors. Therefore, they need to undertake improvement initiatives, re-disciplining to conform to appropriate, expected standards, for which the teachers are held responsible. These disciplinary procedures are taking place. For example, the school in



which I observed the Mark-Making with Sensory Stimuli session had an Estyn re-inspection scheduled for the following day. Estyn is the inspectorate for Wales, responsible for addressing issues of standards and ensuring schools are meeting targets. While the Arts Champions described their practice as offering care during these stressful times, an alternative, Foucauldian (1991) reading of events might argue that the teachers need re-disciplining—they need to be kept docile in order to accept this regime of truth. Furthermore, by accepting the regime of truth (i.e. that standards are low, improvement is necessary and an inspection will determine whether this has been achieved), the teachers also accept responsibility and accountability for raising standards. Mindfulness is offered as a coping mechanism for stress, but in this instance, it is also a pacifier, a means of subjectifying (Foucault 1991) the individual to accept the technology of power—Estyn, that will bring about the re-discipline—an ‘improved’ school, that meets the pre-determined standards set by Government.

Furthermore, the focus on the individual removes any possibility for coordinated resistance. As Arthington (2016) argues, by seeing unhappiness or stress as a reflection of one’s poor choices rather than related to social factors, it becomes something to be accepted and tolerated, instead of being acted upon. The emphasis on improving self through mindfulness implies that it is the self that is at fault, not the circumstances in which the individual finds herself.

It is not the Arts Champions’ place to challenge the authority of the Inspectorate, nor was it their intention to support this disciplinary power, but the focus on mindfulness may have unwittingly re-affirmed the disciplinary authority the Government exerts over these teachers. Through this reading, it would appear that creativity, with its intrinsic association

with mindfulness, is an agency for perpetuating the power/knowledge of Government over school improvement initiatives—it is itself a technology of power.

However, I would argue that there is an alternative reading of the role of the Arts Champions in this power struggle. Returning to Žižek (2009), the re-disciplining of teachers through the school improvement initiatives can be understood as ‘systemic violence’ (1)—a consequence of the smooth functioning of our political (education) system and its efforts to raise standards in order to compete globally. Žižek (2009) argues that, rather than rising up in revolution, the appropriate form of action against violence is to contemplate, through critical analysis. A lack of active, visible rebellion against the assumed authority of the disciplinary measures demonstrates a refusal to accept this authority. The struggle acknowledges the power, bolstering the presumed authority of the state. In this reading, the AWE programme is enabling the teachers to reject the authority of the Consortium. The teachers who participated in the Mark-Making workshop the evening before an Estyn re-inspection, signify a refusal to acknowledge the authority of the Consortium that demands improvement from the school. Rather than expend all their energies in fighting the violence of government control (culture of accountability) with a violence of refusal, complaint or strike, the teachers here are refuting its power by choosing not to register its influence. The teachers’ focus on relieving their own stresses mindfully, rather than worrying or resisting (enacting violence on the self or rebelling against the systemic violence), raises the teachers’ actions to a position of superior morality in disengaging from the power struggle. This disengagement represents what Žižek (2009) refers to as a ‘divine violence’ (163). Following this argument, the Arts Champions’ advocacy of mindfulness can be understood as a subversion of systemic violence, a quiet revolution that refuses to acknowledge the authority of accountability and performativity at work in the education system.

This raises questions around the benefits and role of arts education, in this instance, to support wellbeing, using techniques of mindfulness. The potential for mindfulness to hold social and political currency through, for example, keeping teachers disciplined, or conversely by enabling teachers to disrupt disciplinary processes, suggests that the link with mindfulness will influence the purpose of arts education, and its value to multiple stakeholders. This, in turn, raises questions about how the arts are used, to whose benefit, and whether other, political objectives are being served, under the guise of wellbeing.

### **Conclusion**

The AWE programme was developed and delivered by a group of Arts Champions in Network D—one of the four Regional Arts and Education Networks established in response to the Welsh Government and Arts Council Wales strategy document, *Creative Learning Through the Arts* (Welsh Government 2015). The professional learning opportunities delivered through this initiative aimed to address an identified need to increase teachers' and pupils' access to and experience of the arts. Rather than addressing specific skills or knowledge in the arts, the AWE programme focused on supporting the wellbeing of teachers through creative practice. The result was an approach to PL that assumed an association between creativity, mindfulness and positive wellbeing. In this context, creativity was enacted as a carnival and conceptualised as ubiquitous (Banaji et al 2010).

Given the specific focus of the methodology, the findings of this research project are not generalizable. However, the choice to focus on teachers' wellbeing through mindfulness contributes to debates and raises further questions around the perceived value of creativity, and the role of mindfulness in art schooling contexts. This is of particular interest in relation to school improvement initiatives within education systems characterised by a culture of accountability. The longer-term impact of this programme could be explored by

returning to the schools to carry out research at a later date. Furthermore, the above discussion is constrained by the individualised experience of the workshops and their intended aims. It would be of value to wider discussions investigating how the AWE programme compares with other examples of school-based professional learning centred on the arts. This would enable inquiry around the role of the arts in mindfulness practice and wellbeing more generally, for school staff.

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