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Possibility thinking

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Section III

Creativity and creative thinking
Introduction: possibility thinking as the engine of little c creativity

Human beings are inherently creative, transforming what is given to what might be in all aspects of their lives. We see this capacity in very young children as they first recognise and then explore ideas and resources, for example, finding that a flap on a toy reveals a mirror and then opening and closing repeatedly, or holding up a stick and declaring it is an umbrella.

By asking ‘what if?’ the transition is made from ‘what is’ to ‘what might be’, or from ‘what is this?’ to ‘what can I/we do with this?’. This heart of creativity is what I call Possibility Thinking. It is present at all ages and across life and can be seen as the engine which drives the shift from ‘what is this?’ to ‘what can I do with this?’ Such what if? thinking can be seen in the toddler who makes mud and grass ‘soup’, in teenagers designing hypotheses and fair tests in science and in adults taking a short cut in traffic or considering whether to introduce one friend to another.

As well as what if thinking, Possibility Thinking also involves as if thinking; behaving as though one had a different identity and taking on another’s perspective. This may be intuitive, in the way young children take on other personae during role play or in the way that older children may for example mimic behaviours of hero figures in, say, music or sport – or may be structured into learning experiences where students are encouraged to take on roles so as to play out a range of decision-making scenarios.

The term ‘Possibility Thinking’ (PT) was coined at the end of the twentieth century (Craft, 2000) embedded in exploration of the everyday creativity involved in successfully identifying and navigating life (Craft, 2001). It highlighted the value and nature of personal agency in the early twenty-first century as involving taking intentional action in relation to both finding and solving problems, using intuition as well as logic to cope with everyday challenges, and as inherently innovative, enabling forward motion in all aspects of life.

This everyday understanding of creativity was developed first theoretically and then through a mix of empirical and theoretical work to explore how it might reflect how young children in particular manifest their creative engagement (Craft, 2002). As with the account of PT in relation to adults, the account of PT in young children’s lives foregrounds the everyday element of creativity. It is important to locate the work on PT in relation to the wider creativity research field, in relation to focus.
For, whilst creativity researchers are in agreement that creativity fundamentally involves novelty that is original and useful (has an impact), researchers also acknowledge a spectrum of originality and impact in relation to creativity.

At one end of the creativity spectrum, the creativity may be original to the maker but not necessarily more broadly – and so its impact too may be limited – this is sometimes referred to as ‘everyday creativity’, or ‘little c creativity’. This is the end of the creativity spectrum at which Possibility Thinking has been researched. Boden (2004) refers to such novelty at a personal level as psychological, and the idea as P-creative. Craft (2001) refers to the same phenomenon as ‘little c’ or personal effectiveness and life-wide resourcefulness, while Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) distinguish mini-c creativity (personal meaning-making), from everyday creativity or little c (creativity shared with others). In the middle of the spectrum is what Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) call ‘pro-c’ (professional) creativity. And at the other end entirely, the continuum reflects high originality and impact, or ‘big C’ creativity (such as possessed by Gandhi or Einstein); this is what Boden calls ‘H’ creativity or ‘historical’ creativity that changes the world, or that generates novel ideas which transform paradigms.

It is argued that children’s ‘what if’ thinking, and perspective-taking, or ‘as if’ engagement, are the engine of everyday creativity (Craft, 2001), the exploratory transition from ‘what is’ to ‘what might be’. This chapter explores the concept of possibility thinking, discussing how the research has been undertaken and what has been learned from it.

What does the research tell us about Possibility Thinking?

Conceptual and empirical research on possibility thinking has been developed since the mid-1990s. Co-researching with teachers and practitioners in early years and primary classrooms using a qualitative research approach, we have sought to identify the nature of PT together with pedagogical strategies that seem to foster it. Carefully selected episodes of children’s sustained, focused, playful activity (both in relation to imaginative play among younger children and in relation to more formal curriculum content among older learners) across the age range two to eleven have been analysed by university staff and teacher researchers. All of the research has been undertaken in naturalistic settings in early years and primary classrooms in England, using observation, interview and video-stimulated review enabling teachers and children to reflect on learning. Drawing material for analysis from immersive playful episodes, analysis has involved both inductive and later also deductive analysis.

Research Focus 1: the nature of Possibility Thinking

The early empirical studies developed Craft’s original conceptualisation and created a framework for identifying PT in a seminal study undertaken by Burnard et al., 2006. The key features of PT were: question-posing, play, immersion, innovation, risk-taking, being imaginative and self-determination (Burnard et al., 2006), as shown in Figure 13.1.

These features as seen in Possibility Thinking were defined in a later chapter as follows (Craft et al., 2008):

- **Posing questions:** children’s questions, both verbal and non-verbal, frequently made visible through playful thinking in an ‘as if’ space.

- **Play:** children’s serious, highly engaged, extended exploration, developing and combining ideas, imagining situations, generating and solving diverse problems.
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Immersion: children’s deep involvement in a benign environment offering both high emotional support and high cognitive challenge.

Innovation: children’s strong, playful connections between ideas, often supported, triggered and extended through well-chosen adult provocations.

Risk-taking: children moving into original spaces with courage.

Being imaginative: children engaging in what might be, inventing imaginary worlds as decision-makers and designers.

Self-determination: children exercising independence in decision making and actions, their contributions valued by those around them as they generate and follow through ideas.

Beyond the seminal study by Burnard et al. (2006), four subsequent studies were undertaken. The first focused on children’s questions, yielding a taxonomy of questioning in PT episodes (Chappell et al., 2008). As shown in Figure 13.2, the analysis in this study illustrated how through immersive play environments, children’s self-determined activity led them to generate and respond to their own questions with imagination and risk-taking, through innovative ideas and actions.

In this study, the analysis of how children engaged in such question-posing and question-responding to generate innovation, brought out the vitally important role of the inherent breadth of possibility in any classroom activity, as well as relationships between question-posing and question-responding. It highlighted different kinds of questioning from ‘leading questions’ which frame the creative endeavour to ‘service questions’ enabling enquiries to proceed, and ‘follow-through’ questions often used at a practical level. Questions were expressed verbally and more frequently non-verbally through enacted expression. The relationships between degrees of inherent possibility, question posing and question responding, and leading, service and follow-through questions are represented in Figure 13.3.
A second study beyond Burnard et al. (2006) drew back to a broader focus being concerned with the nature of possibility thinking in older primary children aged 9–11 (Craft et al., 2012). Episodes selected for analysis were again drawn from playful immersive contexts, this time from within science, art and mathematics. The study further highlighted the role of the children’s questioning stance, evidenced both verbally and nonverbally (through expression, gesture and body language). Most features of possibility thinking identified in the previous studies were evidenced strongly but risk-taking could not be discerned, which may perhaps reflect curriculum and assessment constraints affecting older learners. Significantly, the study identified peer collaboration as an emergent PT feature and documented integration in children’s engagement of imaginative and playful behaviour; particularly striking given the older age group.

A third study undertaken in parallel with the second, focused on four year olds in an early years setting (Craft, Mcconnon & Matthews, 2012) and explored Possibility Thinking as manifest in child-initiated play and adults’ integral roles in this not only in the provocation of play

Figure 13.2 Representation from Chappell et al. (2008) of the elements of possibility thinking

*T innovation as possible outcome of possibility thinking as the engine of creative learning
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episodes but in engaging within the playful episodes themselves. As shown in Figure 13.4, this study revealed blending of individual, collaborative and communal creativity inherent in the children’s engagement, confirmed the role of risk-taking for these younger learners who were willing to pit their perspectives against those of others including their teachers, and highlighted the framing role of the leading question. This study also investigated the effectiveness of five pedagogical strategies by which practitioners fostered possibility thinking in child-initiated play (discussed further below under ‘Focus 2 – Pedagogy’). The pedagogical strategies used were: provoking possibilities, allowing time and space, being in the moment, making interventions and mentoring in partnership. The first four of these blended child-initiated with adult-initiated impetus reflecting earlier work (e.g. Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) exploring children’s play.

Figure 13.3 Question-posing and question-responding (from Chappell et al, 2008)
A fourth study by Craft et al. (2012) undertook a systematic re-analysis of all of the immersive, playful episodes involved in earlier studies, and investigated the role of narrative in each. This systematic re-analysis identified three different types of narrative (fantasy, everyday and historical) evident in children’s playful episodes. As shown in Figure 13.5, analysis showed that all narrative episodes shared in common certain features: a sense of character, plot, sequence, significance and emotional investment.

This study of narrative showed how questioning and imagination each inherently involved narrative often shaped by children’s questions and imagination, but also reciprocally questions and imagination were fuelled by narratives developed during immersive playful episodes. Whilst the parallel study by Craft, McConnon and Matthews (2012) discussed above had highlighted how children and adults frequently generate possibility thinking together, what the narrative-focused re-analysis revealed was that adult narrative was much less potent than children’s own narratives, in shaping their questions and imagination.

Taking the core features of PT together with the new narrative features, the research team is, as of 2014, adding a fifth study of the nature of possibility thinking by exploring the role of PT in social change in classrooms and schools. A small-scale study of PT was undertaken in England, in which the role of PT in creative social change in primary schools was investigated (Chappell and Craft, 2013). In this study, two large primary schools were studied for what they shared in common in terms of creative social change. The findings revealed each school demonstrated a strength of shared values which gave staff a sense of both direction and security, almost protection from other influences for example from the wider policy environment. But whilst they shared this in common the leadership styles of the head teachers were very different, one being closely focused on evidence within a clear hierarchical leadership with the vision for...
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change initiated at the top, the other being much more organic with a flattened hierarchy of leadership with the vision for change emerging from the community.

In this fifth study, all core elements of PT were evident across the two schools. With the focus on adult leadership in this study, all elements were related to staff rather than pupils. In contrast to the classroom studies of PT where question-posing and responding belonged to the pupils, in this study question-posing and responding was driven by the head teachers. In both sites imagination was very strongly evidenced, as was self-determination although expressed differently. Each school expressed and evidenced action-intention, although to differing degrees. Both schools strongly evidenced innovation, adapting, developing and making connections between ideas to create new initiatives in schools. However risk-taking was less evident. The study revealed the importance to staff in both schools of a sense of narrative, plot and sequence based in their core shared values. PT did seem to have a key role to play in making social change in each, with evidence of the life-wide dynamo at work in each.

In thinking about young children’s creativity, PT helps us to understand how children inhabit the world of imagination that allows them to pose ‘what if’ questions as well as engaging in ‘as if’ behaviours. We see this at work in all aspects of their learning. A recent European study of creativity in science and mathematics in the early years across nine countries, Creative Little Scientists (http://www.creative-little-scientists.eu/content/deliverables), in which two of the core PT researchers have been involved, provided a great deal of evidence of children aged 3–8 engaged in PT.

Figure 13.5 Overview of role of narrative in PT (Cremin, Chappell & Craft, 2012)
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For example two six year olds in England were investigating how a range of flat shapes might slot together to make a 3D shape. Their teacher had set them the challenge of making any 3D shape, but to use a rule in making it. Initially the children generated ‘what if’ questions as the transcript of their talk shows:

Girl: ‘I’ve got an idea’ [takes the hexagon flat shape] . . . ‘We could make it irregular’ [starts adding rectangles, Boy helps]
Boy: ‘We need more rectangles’ [Extended dialogue]
Boy: ‘This is so hard . . . difficult’

As the children begin to struggle with the construction of their shape, they start to enter an ‘as if’ space:

Girl: ‘I’m going to walk inside . . . I’m going to break through the door . . . Open my house’
Boy [opens one of the ends of the 3D cylinder shape they have built as if it was hinged like a door] ‘It’s like a house, it’s like a cylinder house’
Girl: ‘It’s raining, I need to get into my house, It’s raining, I need to get into my house’ [laughter]

The children’s laughter suggests that they know they are moving away from their mathematical investigation, however their narrative then brings them back to the mathematics as they consider how to describe the shape that they have made. The girl highlights that the shape they have made is not a cylinder, having six sides, and so the two children name it a ‘cylinca’. They inform their teacher, giving their justification for it, demonstrating by touching the sides. Here we can see their ‘what if’ and ‘as if’ question-posing and question-responding fuelled in an immersive, playful, emotionally enabling context, by imagination, self-determination, intentionality and innovation. Their collaboration led to jointly generated and owned ideas.

What these studies of PT among children, adults and the interactions between children and adults have shown so far is how the consistent core features of PT are driven by question-posing and question-responding through individual, collaborative and communal engagement, driven by a shared narrative in an immersive context. The ownership of the questions is determined by the narrative that they form part of, whether the question-poser is a child or an adult. And whilst the ways in which the PT features are enacted through the different studies does vary according to classroom and school culture, they are almost all (with the exception of risk which is sometimes absent) always present in little c creativity.

Research Focus 2: pedagogy that enables Possibility Thinking

Alongside Focus 1 which seeks to define and understand what PT is and how it drives everyday creativity for children and adults in learning contexts is a second and integrated focus on what pedagogical strategies enable PT. Teaching for creativity, or enabling possibility thinking, demands classroom and school practices which encourage, nurture and celebrate ‘what if’ and ‘as if’ thinking in students. Research by the core team in early years and primary school settings in England over a number of years reveals that teaching for PT involves the development of an inclusive learning environment in which:

• children’s experiences and ideas are highly valued;
• dialogue between children and between children and teachers is encouraged;
• an ethos of respect is nurtured and children as well as teachers experience meaningful control, ownership, relevance and innovation in learning.


An important aspect of pedagogy that fosters PT is how inherently ‘possibility broad’ or ‘possibility narrow’ any particular task is. Thus, the seven-year-olds who have learned about how to fold, bend, shape and fasten newspaper and who have been set the challenge of designing a hat which will stay on their head and keep out the rain are able to engage in a much broader kind of Possibility Thinking than children of the same age given a range of hat templates to choose from in order to cut out, fasten and decorate one.

Being acutely aware of possibility breadth requires pedagogical sensitivity, as does another of the research findings documented alongside the original seminal PT study (Cremin et al., 2006), which reveals how the features of PT are fostered by teacher–child interactions in an enabling context in which teachers offer children time and space to develop ideas, prioritise learner agency and ‘stand back’ in order to observe children’s active engagement and to select when to intervene, as shown in Figure 13.6. This means teachers recognise the dilemma of providing enough but not too much structure or intervention.

As indicated above two later studies revealed the complexity of the relationship between children’s and adults’ thinking. In the first of these later studies, focusing on four year olds, Craft, McConnon, and Matthews (2012) explored PT manifest in child-initiated play and adults’ roles in this. Analysis of this provocation-style approach to teaching and learning, revealed an imaginative dynamic between practitioner and child; pedagogues ‘stepped forward’ and also ‘stood back’ as appropriate, encouraging, through use of provocation, which fuelled children’s imaginative storying, as shown in Figure 13.7.

![Figure 13.6](image_url)

*Figure 13.6 Pedagogy that nurtures PT, initial work (Cremin et al., 2006)*
In the second of the later studies (Cremin et al., 2012), we see that whilst questioning and imagination emerge from narrative, so narrative is built by children’s questions and imagination within immersive playful episodes. Whilst there is evidence among the four year olds studied by Craft, McConnon and Matthews that PT is frequently generated by adults and children together, this wider study of episodes spanning the age range 3–11 showed that pedagogy which fosters such reciprocity between questioning imaginative engagement and narrative during playful episodes, foregrounds the children’s perspectives which have far more potency than those of adults.

The potency of children’s perspectives in relation to question-posing and narrative-building was evidenced in the European study Creative Little Scientists, exploring creativity in early science and mathematics. For example, in Belgium a class of children aged four to six, working with two teachers, explored the story of Jack and the Beanstalk at their own request. This became the focus of science work prompted by teachers’ questions but led by the children’s own narrative, reflection, reasoning and evaluation. Although the questions are posed by the teachers, the episode below shows how the children’s answers and ideas boost other children to interact.

Teacher 1 ‘What does Jacques have to do to escape?’ [Several children are now reacting toward each other considering this question]
Child 1 ‘I know, maybe there is a key nearby to open the oven.’
Child 2 ‘No, the giant has the key.’
Child 3 ‘If the giant opens the oven and he sees the child.’
Teacher 2 ‘Yes, what then?’

Figure 13.7 Adult and child engagement in play-focused PT (Craft et al., 2012)
Child 4 ‘Then the child have go between the legs of the giant. He has to loosen the goat and then the goat will attack the giant, who will fall.’

Teacher 1 ‘But a goat against a giant. How large is the goat?’ [One of the children, C, is showing how large a goat is, almost his own length.]

Teacher 1 ‘Look at how large a goat is and C is a small child. C is maybe as large as Jack.’

C ‘oeopsie’

The children are keen and excited to bring in more ideas and solutions for Jacques. Children give their opinions however when there is too much commotion the teachers bring in another question stimulating the children to reason and reflect. In this episode, after one child notices that in one of the pictures of the giant he has mushrooms growing in his armpits, the teachers stimulate inquiry and scientific understanding of children by reference to the children’s own bodies. Investigations and observations are planned, evidence is gathered and communicated:

Teacher 2 ‘Where is your armpit?’ [The teacher asks this of all the children].
Teacher 1 ‘Show me your armpit.’ [Every child shows and points to their armpits].
Teacher 2 ‘Yes, here is the hole under your arm.’
Teacher 1 ‘Are there also mushrooms growing under your arms?’ [The children are saying no and are also shaking their heads.]
Teacher 2 ‘You know what, I’m going to check it by Child 2.’ ‘We are going to see if there aren’t any mushrooms growing in her armpits.’ [All the children are watching the teacher and Child 2. With the child’s permission, the teacher rolls up the sleeve.]
Teacher 1 ‘Look at C2 her armpit. Are there any mushrooms growing there?’ [The children are saying no].
Teacher 1 ‘Why does it happen with the giant?’
Child ‘Because he is dirty.’
Teacher 2 ‘Because he is dirty?’
Child ‘He has a pimple.’
Teacher 2 ‘Yes and it looks dark at his nose and his ears.
Child ‘Giants eat people.’
Teacher 1 ‘What, do they eat people?’
Teacher 2 ‘Do you get mushrooms if you eat people?’
Children ‘No’ ‘Yes’ ‘That is only with giants.’

What is striking about this example is the way the children and the teachers together enter both a ‘what if’ and an ‘as if’ space of imagination to seek to understand why the giant has mushrooms in his armpit and yet they do not themselves. The children’s explanation is partially informed by their own fantasy narrative and partly by everyday narrative. The teachers step forward into the children’s space but not so far that the children’s agency is prevented.

This pattern of ‘what if’ and ‘as if’ engagement informed by narrative and where personal agency is foregrounded, was evident too in the study of PT and social change in two English primary schools reported under Research Focus 1 (Chappell and Craft, 2013). Further work is needed to explore the dynamics of what enables teachers’ own PT however a very early study of this did highlight the delicate balance between individuals’ creativity (Craft, 1996, 1998) revealing the dangers of a focus on teacher creativity without reference to the creativity of other teachers or of children and others.
From what is to what might be: PT generating social change

Since the earliest studies of PT, alongside the core research team’s work PT has formed the focus of doctoral work mainly in the early years and primary age phase, at both The Open University and Exeter University and supervised by members of the core PT team (Anna Craft, Teresa Cremin and Kerry Chappell). Additional studies have also been undertaken, for example PT in creative partnership among 11–14 year olds (Craft with Chappell and Rolfe, Exeter, 2008–10: AHRC funding). Perhaps the most significant direction of research however for PT is that which seeks to situate it in relation to how childhood and wider social change may connect.

The studies discussed in this chapter show that as children grow older, PT increasingly involves collaboration and ‘sharing’ (developing shared views), as well as ‘shining’ (having their own ideas). Older learners become increasingly absorbed in what emerges from their what if and as if thinking, in relation to taking action and doing something with ideas they have developed. The research on PT supports a perspective on childhood which sees children as capable and potent (as opposed to being vulnerable and at risk). These polarised perspectives on childhood are explored in some detail elsewhere (for example, Craft 2011, 2012) in relation to children’s engagement in and responses to a marketised and globalised world.

The capacity to engage actively and responsibly in generating novelty that is valuable to the community as a whole, is increasingly vital as pace and uncertainty in change at social, economic, technological and environmental levels demand creativity of young and old in framing present and future lives on the planet. Governments the world over recognise this and increasingly highlight the importance of developing creativity in the educational system. Recent research applications of PT led by the core team seek to explore its potency in enabling children to engage in such social change through two new European studies which are both informed by the perspective that whilst children’s lives are increasingly defined by and harnessed to the global marketplace, making them consumers and producers within a very narrow set of values (Craft, 2005, 2012, 2013, in press), educators and children can harness PT to challenge such assumptions and to generate ethically responsible creative change. The impetus to consider how PT can foster social change stems from discomfort with the increased marketisation of children’s lives together with the increased agency afforded to children and young people by digital media (Craft, 2013).

The first of the European projects which is looking at how PT can foster social change, C2Learn, is working with learners aged ten and above, to harness digital gameplaying and networking in learners’ lives within school, college and university. Foregrounding the individual, collaborative and communal ethical dimensions inherent in creativity, and recognising the reciprocity involved in both making and being made (personal identity thus shaped alongside creative expression), this consortium from United Kingdom, Austria, Denmark, Greece and Malta is applying the process of Wise Humanising Creativity (WHC) developed by Chappell and Craft (2011) within ethically demanding gameplaying scenarios. Fuelled by PT, the generative actions of learners are focused on ‘quiet revolutions’, in other words social change valued by the community as a whole in which learners play a leading and emancipatory role. The study is exploring how a high trust and empowering digital gaming and networking environment facilitates children’s ‘what if’ and ‘as if’ activity, enabling them to have ideas and see them through. Findings will start to be reported during 2014 through deliverables on the website (http://www.c2learn.eu/?q=node/116) and journal articles.

In the second of the European projects, CREAT-IT (http://www.creatit-project.eu/) the focus is on creative science education with a focus on teachers’ professional development that encourages arts-infused creative science education with children aged 7–14,
through science cafes, science theatre and ‘write a science opera’. Spanning Belgium, England, Greece, Italy, Norway and Serbia, the consortium is using a pedagogical framework for the creative science education which has at its heart the trigger of PT. As in C2Learn, wise humanising creativity provides a lens and practical process through which children and their teachers and other partners working with them on creative projects, consider the ethics and consequences of the creativity that is generated by PT. Informed by previous work on PT and wise humanising creativity, 12 pedagogical principles have been identified as a starting point in this study:

1. **Professional wisdom**: deeply contextualised knowledge often informed by intuition.
2. **Individual, collaborative and communal activities for change**: acknowledging shared identities, allowing for difference but with a shared creative process and purpose.
3. **Risk, immersion and play**: and recognising how pedagogy can assist in creating literal space as well as ‘thinking’ space for these to occur.
4. **Different ways of knowing**: knowing that (propositional knowledge), knowing how (practical knowledge), knowing this (aesthetic or felt knowledge), and embodied alongside the verbal.
5. **Dialogue**: between people, disciplines, creativity and identity, and ideas – recognising this can be embodied and that difference may mean conflict and irreconcilable difference.
6. **‘Bottom up’/‘top down’**: new ideas, knowledge, practices from ‘bottom up’ adult-learner activity are ‘in conversation’ with existing ideas, knowledge and practices.
7. **Interrelationship of different ways of thinking around a shared ‘thread’ or ‘throughline’**: problem finding, problem solving, exploring, rationalising, reasoning, reflecting, questioning, experimenting.
8. **Discipline knowledge**: rigorous discipline knowledge of sciences and arts and creativity.
9. **Possibilities**: multiple possibilities thinking/spaces, knowing when to narrow or broaden
10. **Ethics and trusteeship**: adult professionals and learners consider ethics of creative science, guided in decision making by community priorities, ‘trustees’ of outcomes
11. **Importance of materials**: material within which ideas are shaped is extremely important (e.g. their bodies, with props, with paper and pencil, with sculpting materials, with Bunsen burners and test tubes, with chemicals, with equations) contributing to defining the way ideas are thought through, as well as the form and content of ideas.
12. **Empowerment and agency**: through empowering pedagogies, children and adults gain a greater sense of their own agency and self-expression, applied to creative science.

At the time of writing (March 2014) the research outcomes for CREAT-IT and C2Learn are not yet available, however it is expected that both European projects will lend insight into what is involved in PT triggering social change both in terms of its inherent processes and in terms of pedagogical strategies.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the body of qualitative research undertaken initially in England mainly since the start of the twenty-first century, on what PT is and how it is nurtured in classrooms and schools. Introducing more recent work undertaken in a range of European countries and funded by the European Commission, on how PT fuels social change, it identifies the direction that this work is moving in. It traces the journey taken by the core researchers involved in
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this work from a focus on how children’s idea-realisation is nurtured by adults, to an emphasis on how individual, collaborative and communal work between children and between children and adults, framed in a dialogic and ethical context, generates social change. Contexts which enable Possibility Thinking value all ideas, involve both collaboration and independence, value highly a stimulating learning environment and encourage reflection and acknowledge that those involved in making creative possibilities are trustees of ideas generated, both shaping and being shaped by them.

Work currently under way in the two European projects will, it is hoped, offer further insight into how children and adults can define, shape and transform their relationship with their social and cultural context. Such transformation, from what is to what might be, is right at the heart of the impetus of PT and it is hoped that this body of work offers not only insight into the transformative process but encouragement to challenge the performativity and marketisation which tends to define children’s engagement with their learning.

Notes

1 Also published in S. Robson & S. Flannery Quinn (Eds.), The Routledge international handbook of young children’s thinking and understanding. London: Routledge.

2 Completed PhDs include PT in mathematics in upper primary education in England (Clack, Exeter), PT in drama in upper primary education in Taiwan (Lin, Exeter), PT and innovation education (Jonsdottir, Iceland), PT in secondary art in Taiwan (Ting, Exeter), PT in social exclusion (Greenwood, Exeter), PT in early years visual art in England (McConnon, Exeter). Three studies are in their final stages: PT in museum education in Cyprus (Gregoriou, Exeter), PT in piano tuition in Taiwan (Yeh, Exeter), and PT in creative partnership in Wales (Alderson, Open University). Each of these studies has confirmed the core features of PT identified in the Burnard et al. (2006) study and has added new perspectives to how PT can be understood in each particular context.


4 The C2Learn project is supported by the European Commission through the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), under grant agreement no. 318480 (November 2012–October 2015).

5 CREAT-IT is funded with support from the European Commission through the Comenius Programme under grant agreement 539818-LLP-1-2013-NO-COMENIUS-CMP (November 2013–October 2015).

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