**Eric Booth, 20 June 2012**

On 20th June, the NCLN was privileged to have an exclusive session with US education consultant Eric Booth, hosted by Creative Scotland in Edinburgh.

Eric’s presentation was inspirational, providing the stimulus for a lively discussion which continued long after his departure.

**‘Semantic tripwires’**

Eric highlighted the need for a clear understanding of what we mean by the word ‘creativity’. It is often misinterpreted according to people’s own experience, and can even have negative associations for some.

He suggested that we need to identify the specific capacities of creativity which can be recognized by all education practitioners and employers as skills which are valuable in all areas of learning and work. Using these core creative capacities will take away the semantic tripwires associated with the word ‘creativity’ and ensure that creative skills are a common goal across all subjects and employers.

**How to shift a culture – ‘the medium in which you grow’**

Eric shared what he has found to be the most useful strategy to embed creativity across a school or community.

The vision has to be clear, the approach enquiry driven and plans for the transformation long term.

At first, everyone is too busy to take on the change, and three groups identify themselves: a small group of early adopters, a large group from whom there is a certain amount of resistance but also vague interest and then the resisters – the ‘No group’. Eric’s advice is to work with all groups simultaneously, and not to spend too much time with any in isolation.

Year 1 – Questions: What are we trying to learn? What are we trying to make happen?

Ask all groups to discuss what is being learned and what has been tested.

Year 2 – Invitation to all practitioners to try a small experiment, a different approach. Small scale but successful.

Year 3 – Practitioners are invited to contribute more. By now, real change is happening and the conversations taking place are different. A series of modest successes are recognized and individuals are choosing to be involved.

Year 4 The ‘No’ group are **required** to join in along with everyone else and make their own experiments.

This systemic change means that a culture shift has taken place and that this new culture will endure when key individuals leave.

**Changing what people believe – ‘Be the thing’**

People base their actions on what they believe.

Thinking is one thing, belief is another thing altogether.

Effective advocacy is changing what people believe.

Eric asked us to imagine we were trying to convince someone of the value and importance of creativity, and to replace the word creativity with something else – geography, for example. Imagine what that argument might sound like.

In order to believe, we need:

* Evidence
* Personal experience
* Testimony from others
* A sense of where one’s own skills and experience fit with this agenda.

We must be the embodiment of the change we want to see in the world – ie ‘be the thing’.

**Group activity and discussion**

To help us think about how we can make change happen and embed creativity across learning in Scotland, Eric invited us to take some time to think about the following questions. Some of the contributions from the group are included below:

* What are the questions we need to stop asking? (old perspectives and questions that don’t get us anywhere)
  + What are you doing that’s creative?
  + Why aren’t they getting it?
  + How will we be judged?
  + Don’t assume that creativity is taking place in arts subjects or that it isn’t taking place in non-arts subjects
* What are the crucial questions we need to ask consistently to take us in the direction we are looking to achieve?
  + What questions are you asking?
  + How do we help pupils to start using the language of the core creative capacities? (Eric – only 7% of the population ‘own’ the language of the arts)
  + Which element of your creative teaching would you like to highlight?
  + What have you done today that has made you feel proud?

**Further discussion points:**

What would you expect to see in a creative school? – The quality of questions children are being asked.

What is it that turns a good day into a great day? – Most will answer that it is when they are in the ‘flow’ – they feel engaged, totally immersed, creative at that moment. If young people are fully immersed in what they are doing they *want* to be assessed.

**Final words from Eric**

Eric’s opening stance was to complement us on what we are doing in Scotland, he sees us as a world leader – and finds our ambitions for embedding creativity across the curriculum aspirational.

His advice when working with groups is to go in with the attitude ‘this is great work, how can I help you develop it?’

Eric left us with a comment on the difference between entertainment and art:

Entertainment happens within what we already know – it reassures that the world is the way we think it is.

Art happens outside what we already know – we have to ‘not know’ in order to know something knew. We have to be more willing to tolerate the unknown.