Wanted!
Agents of change!

Student teachers at the University of Chichester get involved in creative problem-solving projects in the professional world. **Duncan Reavey** explains...

In this article, I describe an approach which has a simple goal – to challenge student teachers to make change happen so they develop the skills and confidence to do the same in their first jobs.

'Creativity 3' is a 15-credit module that gives final year student primary teachers the chance to develop skills and confidence in creative problem-solving in their professional world. Students work in small self-selected teams of around three to five students. They address real world problems over realistic timescales and, by the end of their projects, provide genuine end products for external clients, typically schools or non governmental organisations (NGOs) such as museums or environmental education centres. Most activity happens between September and December, but if necessary students have until the following May to deliver their final products.

At the University of Chichester we have been learning as we go. This module is unlike anything we have tried before in the University and, as far as we know, it is a first for UK teacher training institutions. In the first two years we have had over 20 diverse projects running each year in different schools, locality clusters and NGOs (see Table 1 for some examples). Schools and NGOs approach the University with ideas that staff may not have time to develop but that fit perfectly with Creativity 3 and developing an interesting range of projects has not been difficult. ▶

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Examples of projects that schools or other educational providers have asked students to lead.

Project	End product
Large scale multimedia collaborative art project for ages 4-8	A banner created by the whole school
Promotion of a special support centre for children with physical difficulties	Information materials explaining the work of the centre to the whole community
Working in partnership to gain EcoSchool status	Whole school engagement to apply for EcoSchool status
Thatching a round house	A new roof created jointly by children and teachers
Raising literacy attainment by working with a group of eight Yr 9 pupils to create the pupils' own radio station Diverse FM. See http://raisingattainmentinliteracy.blogspot.com	New motivation for disengaged children
Working for an adult with learning difficulties in development and promotion of a school woodland trail at a centre he attends	A DVD to promote the trail and centre

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In every case, we see the school or NGO as an external client and students work to help achieve the client's goals. We do not ask schools or NGOs to mentor the students, or assess anything they do. However, when they have comments or concerns that could help progress the project – or the students' learning – they can talk with students or the module coordinator. The students know their clients are busy people but are at the same time an essential resource and value their time with them.

One hour a week we hold 'Muffins & Mindmaps' sessions, with free coffee, tea and muffins or crumpets. These interactive and relaxed sessions provide a chance for students to share news and tips with other project teams and tutors. They are also used to identify areas where further development is needed to help projects succeed such as project management, how to deal with difficult people, building sustainability into projects, recording and presenting reflections and understanding how teams work. University tutors take the role of project consultants, supporting students' project teams while allowing groups to have full ownership of their work and end products. The climax on the last day of the academic year is an Oscar-style gala celebration for students and clients.

The assessment of the end product forms 85% of students' marks for the module. End products might change during the project, for example, if activities lead to positive changes in the way an organisation or person works, these are highlighted by students and we recognise this unplanned but valuable learning. A group reflection on the process of engaging in the project forms the remainder of students' assessment for the module.

Feedback from this course has been positive. Schools and NGOs have congratulated students on 'fantastic innovative work'. One said 'You blew the children away with your enthusiasm and your expertise came across in bucket loads!' External examiners and Ofsted visitors have also given positive reviews of this module. Feedback from students shows that they enjoy the responsibility, build relationships, work alongside different professionals and succeed in meeting challenges on the way.

While we, as tutors, deliberately keep our distance, it's still easy for tutors to get very excited about the changes that students bring about. My personal favourite so far is a project that set out to create an exciting and interactive curriculum but achieved much more besides. The practitioner with whom the students were working now has a different professional philosophy, greater confidence, deeper awareness of learning and teaching issues, and a new positive relationship with peers. Changing people like this is not something we have ever planned to do – and it's mighty difficult to give this a percentage mark at the end of a module – but as students reflect on transformations that they have brought about, their learning benefits immensely.

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