University of Groningen

"Exploring the Implementation of School Policies in Promoting Creativity and Creative Thinking Skills in Primary Education"

A Qualitative Study of Implementation Practices

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#### Abstract

Creativity and creative thinking are increasingly recognized as essential competencies for children's future development (Haakma et al., 2022). This thesis investigates how creativity is promoted within Dutch primary education through two central research questions: (1) How do schools promote creativity in primary education? and (2) How is policy aimed at fostering creativity implemented in school settings? The theoretical framework is based on the model proposed by Starko and Krynski (2020), supplemented by insights from Davis (2011), Von Oech (1973), and Lubart (2018). It focuses on three domains: Curriculum and Content, Understanding the Creative Process, and Classroom Environment.

Using a qualitative approach, policy documents from six primary schools were analysed and interviews with educational professionals were conducted. Findings indicate that while creativity is rarely an explicit policy objective, it is promoted in practice—particularly through activities encouraging exploration, self-expression, and reflection. Most schools prioritize a supportive classroom environment and emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation and student autonomy. However, efforts to develop students' understanding of the creative process are less consistently implemented and often lack clarity in official documentation.

The results unveil a disconnect between formal policies and actual classroom practices. Creativity is frequently embedded within broader educational goals rather than addressed directly as a unique educational goal. To enhance creative development, schools would benefit from adopting a more intentional and integrated approach, aligning explicit policy objectives with pedagogical strategies. Making creative learning strategies more visible in both policy and practice would strengthen their effectiveness and ensure more consistent support for students' creative growth.

### Introduction:

Creativity and creative thinking skills are essential competencies for the future development of children (Haakma et al., 2022). In an increasingly complex and dynamic world, it is impossible to predict the exact changes and challenges that the future will bring. Consequently, it is not feasible to prepare children for every potential scenario. This is one of the reasons creative thinking is also being recognized as one of the 21<sup>a</sup> century skills (SLO, 2023). However, it is possible to cultivate their ability to solve problems independently, adapt to a constantly evolving environment, and develop the requisite cognitive and interpersonal skills. In this context, one of the key roles of educational institutions is to foster these skills in students (Bureau Platform Onderwijs2032, 2016).

Creativity is often characterized as a combination of divergent thinking—the ability to generate a wide range of ideas—and convergent thinking—the ability to evaluate and select the most appropriate solution (Haakma et al., 2022). According to Davis (2011), creativity is an intrinsic quality that exists naturally in individuals, although it may manifest to varying degrees across different people. Barriers to creativity, however, typically emerge through the process of learning. These barriers inhibit creative thinking and can be seen as obstacles that prevent individuals from fully engaging in creative processes. Davis (2011) identifies one such barrier as habitual thinking—when individuals become entrenched in particular patterns of thought, making it difficult to explore alternative, potentially more beneficial solutions (Davis, 2011; Von Oech, 1973). Overcoming these habitual patterns is key to fostering creativity, as it allows individuals to move beyond familiar routes and discover novel ideas and innovative problem-solving pathways. Sternberg (1985) underscores the importance of fostering an environment that nurtures the right attitudes toward creativity. He views creativity not merely as a set of abilities or knowledge, but as an attitude—for example, an essential openness and willingness to "sell" ideas that others may not immediately accept.

Without this critical attitude, creative capacities may remain underdeveloped. Sternberg emphasizes that especially in educational settings, creating environments that support these attitudes is crucial for allowing creativity to flourish. Thus, to foster creativity in individuals, it is essential to recognize both the barriers that hinder creative thinking and the importance of facilitators like cultivating the right environment and attitudes.

The question then arises: How can creative thinking skills be effectively cultivated in educational practice? One promising avenue for fostering creativity lies in the development and implementation of school policies and curricula that prioritize and support creative processes. Research suggests that creativity is something that can be actively nurtured through structured educational approaches. For example, Marcos et al. (2020) propose that creativity can be effectively promoted within the school environment making use of cooperative learning strategies and divergent thinking tasks, which challenge students to engage in open-ended problem-solving. These activities, which encourage exploration, discussion, and critical reflection, provide students with opportunities to practice creative thinking in real-world contexts. The study by Marcos et al. (2020) highlights how such structured educational programs—particularly those that emphasize collaboration and discussion—can significantly enhance students' creative abilities. By integrating these approaches into formal learning settings educators can create environments that actively stimulate and develop creative thinking, thus facilitating the cultivation of essential skills for the future.

Although the establishment of a policy is a necessary foundational step, it is the effective implementation of that policy that ultimately determines whether it will lead to meaningful and sustained outcomes. As Fixsen et al. (2005) emphasize, the process of translating policy into practice is inherently complex and multifaceted. Successful implementation requires more than just the creation of clear guidelines and the allocation of resources; it also necessitates the adoption of strategic implementation frameworks, as well as

continuous monitoring and evaluation throughout the process. Dean Fixsen, the founder of implementation science and the Global Implementation Society, outlines a detailed approach to implementation in which he highlights three key stages. The first stage, paper implementation, involves creating a written plan that outlines goals and a structured approach for achieving them. This design phase is critical for setting clear expectations. The next phase, process implementation, goes further by focusing on the recruitment and professional development (competency building) of staff, as well as optimizing organizational systems and facilities. The final stage, performance implementation, strives for the most optimal outcomes by refining the process to ensure that the target group benefits from the improvements. During this stage, any issues or inefficiencies ("bugs") are eliminated, and the process is perfected (Fixsen et al., 2005; Beckmann et al., 2024).

Another critical aspect of successful implementation is fidelity of implementation (FOI), which refers to how closely the actual execution of a plan aligns with the original design. In the context of educational development plans, FOI evaluates how effectively the implementation process is carried out, considering the factors that influence its success or challenges. Systematic process evaluations, which assess what aspects of implementation are successful and which require improvement, provide valuable insights. This reflective evaluation allows for adjustments and mid-course corrections, ensuring that the implementation stays on track and can be refined as necessary. The information gathered during these evaluations is used to guide future actions and better interpret the results of the implementation efforts. These elements emphasize that effective implementation goes beyond merely executing a plan—it requires ongoing adaptation, attention to fidelity, and continuous refinement to ensure the policy achieves its intended impact, a process also described as recursive bootstrapping (Boekaerts & Minnaert, 2003). Without such careful attention to

implementation, even well-designed policies risk failing to achieve their desired results (Fixsen et al., 2005; Beckmann et al., 2024).

The primary aim of this study is to investigate how schools formulate and implement policies aimed at promoting creativity and creative thinking skills. Additionally, this study seeks to examine the extent to which these policies are effectively executed and whether the implementation methods yield observable outcomes. Given that previous research has identified successful strategies for fostering creative thinking in primary education (Haakma et al., 2022) and that creative thinking is most effectively developed at an early age, this study will focus specifically on primary school students' education.

This leads to the following research questions:

- 1. How do schools promote creativity in primary education?
- 2. How (effectively) is policy aiming at creativity and creative thinking skills implemented within primary school settings?

To address these research questions, a theoretical framework was developed, outlined in the following section. This framework aims to navigate the complexities of promoting creativity in education, as well as the conceptual ambiguity surrounding creativity itself. Following the theoretical framework, the methodology of the study is described, after which the research findings are presented. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the results, including recommendations for practice and an overview of the study's limitations.

## **Theoretical framework**

#### What is creativity?

Creativity is a concept that remains notoriously difficult to define, despite numerous attempts by scholars. While many have sought to pin down a concrete definition, it remains elusive, and some argue that such an endeavour may be inherently futile (Silvia, 2018; Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018). A common consensus is that creativity involves noveltysomething new or original—but the question of whether creativity should also be compelling, appropriate, or valuable is still debated (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018). This raises the question of how to measure creativity, an issue that has proven particularly challenging. Traditionally, divergent thinking tasks have been employed as a common method of assessment (Runco, 2018), while self-assessments are often used to gauge creative ability. More recently, experts have been engaged to evaluate creativity, providing an external perspective on an individual's creative output. Additionally, there is ongoing debate about the existence of different types of creativity. For example, Beghetto (2018) and Richards & Gosling-Jones (2018) distinguish between "mini-C" creativity, which refers to personal, everyday creative expressions, and "Big-C" creativity, which pertains to extraordinary, groundbreaking achievements (Simonton, 2018). However, not all scholars agree with these distinctions (Runco, 2018), and the classification of creativity remains a contentious issue.

Further complicating the matter is the question of whether creativity is domain-general or domain-specific. Some researchers argue that creativity is a universal trait that can be applied across various fields (Baer, 2018), while others assert that creativity is domainspecific and may not be easily transferable from one area to another (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018). These differing views on the nature of creativity highlight the complexity of understanding the phenomenon in a comprehensive manner.

While these theoretical discussions are important, they are not the primary focus of this thesis. Instead, this research is concerned with the question of whether creativity can be taught or fostered. The prevailing belief within the field is that creativity is not a fixed trait but something that can be developed and nurtured (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018), perhaps even more so than intelligence. Some view creativity as a set of abilities or cognitive skills that can be cultivated, while others conceptualize it as a personality trait—an inherent part of an individual's disposition. Davis (2011), for example, discusses the role of creative attitudes and explores the barriers to creativity, such as learning habits, societal rules, perceptual limitations, and emotional constraints. These barriers, he argues, must be identified and addressed to support the creative process.

Personality and motivation are considered critical factors in fostering creativity. Scholars such as Amabile (2018), Feist (2018), and Hennessey (2018) emphasize that an individual's personality traits, particularly their level of intrinsic motivation, play a key role in determining their creative potential. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, influences the degree to which an individual engages with creative tasks, and personality traits can affect how one approaches problems and generates solutions.

Given the multitude of factors that influence creativity, it is essential to explore how these elements can be integrated into educational practices to foster creativity in students. Starko and Krynski (2020) provide a framework for this process, highlighting three critical levels of intervention in the classroom. First, they emphasize the importance of how content is taught, suggesting that the approach to instruction should prioritize creativity-enhancing strategies. Second, they stress the need to help students understand creative skills and habits of the mind, guiding them to recognize and develop the cognitive processes associated with creative thinking. Finally, they advocate for the creation of a classroom environment that supports and encourages creativity. Such an environment should be designed to allow students

to take risks, explore ideas freely, and engage with the material in ways that stimulate creative thought. This multifaceted approach provides a comprehensive framework for fostering creativity in educational settings.

### Theoretical framework

For this thesis, the framework for understanding how creativity is fostered in primary schools will be based on the structure proposed by Starko and Krynski (2020), alongside insights from Davis (2011), Von Oech (1973) and Lubart (2018). Many models for creativity exist, like mini-C and big C from Beghetto (2018), however these models can not so easily be applied to creativity in an educational setting. Starko and Krynsky (2020), however, have laid out a good foundation for how creativity can be stimulated in different areas of education. They describe three elements: Curriculum and Content, Understanding the Creative Process and Classroom environment. Davis (2011), Von Oech (1973) and Lubart (2018) mention other factors, which can be of influence on creativity in educational settings. Davis (2011) and Von Oech (1973) describe how barriers can inhibit the creative mind and learning about these barriers and how to deal with them is something that is possible to be learned in schools and therefore a good addition to the second part of the framework, Understanding the Creative Process. Lubart (2018) also describes many factors, which can be of influence to creativity in schools. For example, he talks about risk taking, the presence of role models and creative thinking methods. These combined factors bring the following theoretical framework that will show how various factors can contribute to the development of creativity in educational settings.

### 1. Curriculum and Content:

Key elements that support creative development include the incorporation of complex questions, encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives, and providing opportunities for self-expression. Thereby requiring them to think for themselves and giving room for

original thought. Additionally, fostering a culture of inquiry, where students are prompted to ask their own questions and are given time for reflection and purposeful mind-wandering, is essential. By reflecting on previous actions and free thought, new ideas might be thought of. Students should also be given the freedom to explore and address their own concerns, which can further stimulate creative thinking.

### 2. Understanding the Creative Process:

It is crucial for students to be guided in understanding the creative process itself. Educators should introduce strategies for overcoming common barriers to creativity, such as habits and "idea squelchers". When one is conscious of such barriers, one might be able to circumvent them and overcome these barriers. Teaching students about models and strategies that encourage problem-solving, divergent and convergent thinking is also integral to fostering creativity. Students might not be able to achieve this on their own and by providing them with strategies; it provides a tool and way to achieve di- or convergent thinking. Additionally, exposing students to real-life situations and challenges related to creativity can help them understand the difficulties involved, thereby preventing feelings of inadequacy.

## 3. Classroom Environment:

Creating an environment conducive to creativity involves providing students with the freedom to take creative risks and promoting intrinsic motivation. Educators should allow for diverse approaches to problem-solving and make tasks more personalized to individual students' needs and interests. They should encourage students to be creative and use a different approach and not just follow what the handbook states. Thoughtful use of rewards is important to ensure they do not undermine intrinsic motivation. Additionally, overcoming traditional barriers that stifle creativity, such as the pressure to conform, is essential in

supporting students' creative growth. It is important that an environment is created where these barriers are limited or if possible not present at all.

### Method:

To address the research questions, a qualitative research methodology is employed. The selection of schools is conducted using a convenience sampling method. In doing so, a representative sample is aimed for, including schools with special denominations, such as Dalton, Montessori, both Christian/catholic and public schools. Special education schools are excluded. Initially, schools in the city of Groningen were contacted, with outreach expanding outward until the desired sample size was achieved.

### Procedure

Schools were first contacted by phone to gauge their interest in participating and were informed about the research objectives and the broader aims of the study. Then they will be asked to share relevant policy documents related to their approaches for promoting creativity and creative thinking. However, if such documents were not available, broader school policy documents—such as those outlining the institution's general educational goals and strategies—were considered, especially if, according to the theoretical framework, they contained elements that might indirectly foster creative thinking. If they were willing to share these documents, they were subsequently invited to participate in an interview at a later date. Interested schools received further information about the research and an informed consent form via email.

The purpose of collecting these documents is to address the first research question, which concerns the nature and scope of policies designed to promote creativity within the participating schools. Where possible, school directors or other key individuals involved in promoting creativity, such as the support coordinator, were invited to participate in semistructured interviews. All interview participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and scope, and their participation followed the informed consent guidelines of the University

of Groningen, ensuring they understood their rights, including confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Informed consent was obtained before the interviews, and participants had the option to withdraw at any time without consequence. These interviews allow for a deeper exploration of how the schools implement their creative thinking policies, providing insight into the practical application of these policies and strategies. The interviews contribute to answering the second research question regarding the actual implementation of creativity-promoting policies.

### Sample

The study initially aimed to include nine primary schools, with an ideal target of 13 to 14 schools if feasible. This sample size was considered sufficient to approach data saturation, a concept described by Hennink and Kaiser (2021) as the point at which additional data collection no longer yields new insights or themes. Achieving data saturation was important to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of policies and implementation practices related to creativity in Dutch primary education. However, despite outreach efforts, only six schools ultimately agreed to participate in the research. While this smaller sample still allowed for meaningful qualitative analysis, it may have limited the generalizability of the findings and the ability to capture the full range of practices across different school contexts. This limitation in the number of participating schools also had implications for the representativeness of the sample. While a larger sample-including the originally intended Dalton and Montessori schools-would have broadened the diversity of educational perspectives and potentially yielded additional findings, the impact of this shortfall was mitigated to some extent. The inclusion of a Jenaplan school (and a Cultuurplan school) ensured representation of more progressive educational models. Moreover, the overall sample included a balanced mix of public and Catholic/Christian institutions. As such, although the sample is smaller and less varied than initially planned, it still offers a satisfactory foundation

for addressing the research questions and capturing a range of approaches to promoting creativity in primary education.

## Interviews

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, which allows for flexibility while ensuring that all key topics are addressed. The interview questions were grounded in the aforementioned literature reviewed for the study, ensuring that the data collected is relevant to the research objectives. Questions were set up using the theoretical framework and its different domains. The basic interview protocol can be found as appendix 1A and 1B. Furthermore, the questions integrated key aspects derived from the organization's policy documents. It is anticipated that school directors are more willing to engage in a conversation about the implementation of creative thinking policies through an interview, as it is likely to be more conducive to detailed responses compared to a written questionnaire. At the start of the interview, participants will be provided with detailed information about the research and given the opportunity to ask questions, after which an informed consent form will be signed. Permission was sought to record the interview; if granted, the recordings will be transcribed for comprehensive analysis.

### **Ethics**

Prior to the commencement of data collection and analysis, ethical approval was obtained from the university's Ethical Review Committee. As part of this process, a comprehensive data management plan was developed to ensure the responsible handling of all research data in compliance with institutional and legal standards (see appendix 2). This plan outlined procedures for data storage, confidentiality, anonymization, and participant consent. Throughout the research process, all data were managed in accordance with this plan. Informed consent (see appendix 3 and 4) was obtained from all participating schools and

individuals, with assurances provided regarding the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Additionally, interview data were anonymized during transcription to protect the identities of the participants and to uphold ethical standards in qualitative research.

### Data analysis

The data was coded and analysed using qualitative content analysis techniques, which focus on identifying recurring themes, patterns, and categories within the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Abductive coding will be employed in the analysis, beginning with a deductive approach informed by the theoretical framework. However, the process also allows for open coding to identify emergent themes that have not been previously recognized in the literature but are relevant to the study. Additionally, the constant comparative method (CCM) is employed, allowing for the iterative comparison of data across different sources (e.g., between schools and documents), helping to refine emerging themes and ensuring that the analysis remains grounded in the data itself (Boeije, 2002).

### **Results - Policy documents:**

## Overview:

In total, nine policy documents from six different schools were analysed. These included primarily school-wide plans and annual plans, although in some cases both types were available. Additionally, one school provided a cultural development plan (*cultuurplan*), and another contributed a specific project plan. The sample included a variety of school types: one Jenaplan school, one *cultuurplanschool*, four Christian or Catholic schools, and two public schools.

For five out of six schools, the analysis focused on overarching school-wide policies. In one case, a specific project plan served as the primary source; however, supplementary information regarding the broader school context was obtained through an interview conducted with school staff.

The coding process was guided by the three main themes derived from the aforementioned theoretical framework: Curriculum and Content, Understanding the Creative Process, and Classroom Environment. A table summarizing the codes employed and the frequency with which each was cited is presented below.

Curriculum and	Quotations	Understanding the	Quotations	Classroom and	Quotations
Content		Creative Process		Environment	
Challenging the student	9	Creative Process	11	Creative opportunities	6
Chance for self-	11	Freedom to take	5	Diverse	6
expression		risks		approaches	

## Table 1: Codes and quotations used in the policy documents analysis

Curiosity	14	Learning process	4	Encouraged to make own choices	4
Freedom to explore	22	Models and/or strategies	3	Intrinsic motivation	11
High expectations	2	Preparing for real life situations	14	Personalized approach	24
Multiple perspectives	17			Physical environment	12
Room for student input	13			Rewards?	7
Time for reflection	11			Supportive environment	29
Total:	99	Total	37	Total:	99

### 1. Curriculum and Content

## Exploration and curiosity:

The policy documents of all the analysed schools underscore the significance of providing children with the freedom and opportunities to explore their own identities, talents, and interests. Each school seeks to stimulate students' active engagement in their personal development by designing curricula that promote exploration through the provision of a diverse range of materials and activities. This approach is articulated, for example, in the following definition:

"Self-regulation: Guidance initiated by the child themselves and awareness of their own actions, enabling the child to take ownership of their behaviour, take control, and steer their own actions." (Culture Plan, School 4)

A fundamental component of facilitating exploration is the emphasis on exposing students to multiple perspectives. Access to a broad spectrum of experiences enables children to better identify their own strengths and areas for development. In the policy documents, this principle is often reflected in the variety of activities and in the experiences offered to students, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

"Promoting language use through: theatre, play, writing stories and poems. Play and movement through: moving to music, games, improvisation, facial expressions/gestures, and dance. Craft skills through: experimenting with materials and learning techniques. Drawing through: working with a focus on form, colour, composition, materials, and techniques. Musical development through: singing together, music and movement, and rhythmic and melodic training. Performances through: preparation and presentation of a short performance for parents and fellow students." (School Guide, School 1) However, the integration of multiple perspectives extends beyond curricular activities to include engagement with broader societal issues and interpersonal dynamics. For instance, School 3 highlights the connection between education and civic development:

"By linking projects to current social issues, students learn about their role as citizens and fellow human beings, contributing to their development of citizenship." (Policy Plan, School 3)

Similarly, the importance of interpersonal relationships within the classroom context is emphasized:

"Living together: The classroom is a mini-society where you learn how to relate to others and understand that you need each other in order to grow and develop. We learn from and with each other." (Culture Plan, School 4)

Together, these strategies — fostering exploration and exposing students to multiple perspectives — are intended to stimulate students' intrinsic curiosity. Conversely, curiosity itself acts as a catalyst for exploratory behaviour, creating a reciprocal dynamic. This relationship is articulated as follows:

"Curiosity: The desire to know, see, or experience. Curiosity motivates exploratory behaviour in order to discover something new." (Culture Plan, School 4)

Several programs explicitly aim to nurture this curiosity. For example, the *Success for All* program promotes literacy development and the enjoyment of reading by actively engaging students in language use: "In the Success for All program, learning to read and reading enjoyment are encouraged by actively engaging children in language use. This is done by reading engaging stories." (School Plan, School 2)

Broader curricular initiatives also seek to cultivate a sustained sense of inquiry:

"By sparking their curiosity about their surroundings (heritage), integrating culture more deeply into the curriculum (world orientation methods), using modern tools (21st-century skills), and making extensive use of our science, talent, and technology lab, students develop a lifelong curious attitude as well as the knowledge and skills needed for continuous learning." (Culture Plan, School 5)

Thus, across the policy documents, exploration, multiple perspectives, and curiosity are presented as interconnected dimensions essential to fostering student development.

## Self-Expression, Student Input and Reflection:

An increased emphasis on exploration and exposure to multiple perspectives inherently creates greater opportunities for self-expression and student input. By granting students the freedom to explore and engage with diverse viewpoints, schools facilitate the development of individual voice and agency. This commitment is further operationalized through opportunities for students to present their work and share their experiences. As one policy document articulates:

"Key principles for activities related to expression include: The development of one's own creativity; The ability to express oneself; Presenting; (Sharing) enjoyment." (School Plan, School 2) Additionally, some schools promote student input through structured group discussions. For instance, one institution describes the implementation of circle discussions:

"Throughout the day, there are several circle discussions where students' experiences or written texts are shared and discussed. This promotes social interaction among students. In the circles, questions are gathered about the topic, and agreements are made on whether and who will answer these questions." (Schoolguide, School 1)

These discussions serve not only to enhance social interaction but also to provide a platform for students to express their thoughts and contribute actively to the learning process.

Moreover, several policy documents highlight the importance of reflection as a means to support students' self-development. For example, one school notes:

"This also means that we encourage students to make their own choices and to reflect on their own actions." (Culture Plan, School 5)

To facilitate reflective practice, some schools incorporate designated moments of quiet contemplation into the daily schedule:

"...there is a daily period of complete quiet throughout the school, giving everyone the space for a moment of reflection." (School Plan, School 1)

Beyond personal reflection, students are also encouraged to reflect on external works, fostering broader cultural and historical awareness:

"Reflection on one's own work and that of others, such as artists. It stimulates reflection on culture, both past and present, and on one's own place in the world." (Culture Plan, School 4)

Through fostering self-expression, facilitating student input, and promoting reflective practices, the analysed schools aim to cultivate critical, autonomous, and socially engaged learners.

## 2. Understanding the Creative Process

## Stimulating the Creative Process:

As evidenced by the frequency of citations in this section from Table 1, the creative process is not extensively reflected upon in the policy documents. While it is sometimes mentioned directly in the case of school 4 and 5, it is typically addressed in a more indirect manner. Furthermore, in many cases, the creative process is integrated into various subject areas, rather than treated as a standalone focus. This is evident in the policy document from School 4, which states:

"Through a differentiated educational approach, the school aims to meet the diverse needs of its students. In addition to academic subjects, children receive lessons in artistic education and social skills. Creativity is encouraged across all of these areas." (Culture Plan, School 4)

The same document further notes:

"We provide broad knowledge and give children the space to develop skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving." (Culture Plan, School 4)

This suggests that while creativity is integrated across subjects, the school also aims to foster it more directly within the curriculum.

A similar pattern is observed at School 5, where the stimulation of the creative process is articulated as an explicit goal rather than a by-product. The policy document from School 5 emphasizes:

"Cultural education promotes the development of important and complex thinking skills, making it highly versatile. Students learn to enhance their creative abilities. It focuses on skills and competencies that are essential for their future." (Culture Plan, School 5)

At School 1, the creative process is mentioned primarily as a goal. For example:

"To think creatively and intuitively." (Schoolplan, School 2)

The policy document also references sensory development, which may indirectly relate to stimulating the creative process. However, the intention behind this reference remains somewhat ambiguous:

"Children need to become aware of the possibilities of their senses, and we help them learn to develop them. We teach children to gain experience by engaging with each other, materials, and learning tools through action, listening, and observation." (Schoolplan, School 2)

Lastly, School 3 takes a more direct approach in fostering the creative process by combining elements from various subjects and employing scaffolding techniques. The school specifically targets the creative process through its STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) projects:

"Here, they work on projects based on STEAM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) and use a STEAM approach, aiming to foster students' mindsets by combining STEM subjects and engaging with them in a creative way." (Policy Plan, School 3)

For the other schools no direct or indirect ways of stimulating the understanding of the creative process is mentioned. Preparing for real life situations:

Preparing students for real-life situations and the challenges inherent in creative processes is considered an important aspect of learning. For instance, the policy document from School 4 emphasizes the role of mistakes in the learning process:

"We want to teach children that school is a place for practice where making mistakes is allowed. Additionally, we aim for students to become aware that not only the product is important, but also the process itself." (Culture Plan, School 4)

Similarly, School 1's policy highlights the importance of fostering resilience and preparing students for future challenges:

"...we help them develop as broadly as possible and become resilient. Children find their place in society and become good global citizens who take responsibility and think of others. That's why we dare to set high standards for them. We see proud children who confidently explore the world." (Schoolplan, School 1)

However, most of the policy documents focus on preparing students for broader reallife situations, rather than directly addressing the specific challenges involved in creative processes. For example:

"The curriculum is focused on preparing students for society and is tailored to the level of the student population." (Jaarplan, School 6)

## **3.** Classroom Environment

Supportive and Physical Learning Environments:

The creation of a supportive and well-structured learning environment is a recurring theme in the policy documents of all analysed schools. There is a strong emphasis on fostering spaces where students feel safe, supported, and appropriately challenged. As highlighted in the policy documents of both School 2 and School 6, the environment is seen as foundational for self-development and learning:

"In a stimulating and challenging environment, the child is given every opportunity for self-development. The aim is for children to become familiar with everyday things." (Schoolplan, School 2)

"We want all students and staff to feel safe within the school and the organization. We believe this is essential, as safety is a fundamental condition for development and learning." (Year Plan, School 6)

An effective learning environment not only supports academic achievement but also nurtures talent and personal growth. This involves not just curriculum design, but also the provision of materials, supportive relationships, and intentional environmental setup. School 3 articulates this dynamic as follows:

"Talent is a person's potential. Talent is not 'in' a student, teacher, or environment/task, but emerges in the moment through a dynamic interaction between these three aspects. When this interaction is optimal, talent moments occur." (Policyplan, School 3)

School 4 similarly underscores the importance of an environment that builds students' self-confidence and offers space to explore and grow:

"We contribute to increasing our children's self-confidence, self-awareness, and skills. We do this by providing them with broad knowledge and giving them the space and trust they need to grow." (Culture Plan, School 4)

A supportive environment also extends beyond the student-teacher relationship. School 1 emphasizes the involvement of parents and other stakeholders, highlighting a collaborative approach to learning:

"Children are able to develop at their own pace, and we offer them the support that matches their talent, ambition, and individual needs. We do this together with parents and other stakeholders in a varied, safe, and rich learning environment. There is also strong coordination between childcare, school, and further education." (Schoolplan, School 1)

Creating a positive environment also requires a shared understanding of behavioral expectations. School 5 outlines the importance of agreed-upon rules that apply to the entire school community:

"At [School 5], rules and agreements have been established that apply to everyone in the school: children, staff, and parents or guardians. We follow three basic rules: care for people, care for materials, and care for the environment. As a result, children feel valued and safe, and their motivation to display positive behavior increases." (Schoolplan, School 5)

Furthermore, diversity within the school environment is framed as a valuable resource for learning and personal development. Interactions among students from different age groups and cultural backgrounds are seen as key to fostering mutual understanding and reducing prejudice: "When children interact with each other from a young age and learn about each other's cultures, prejudices can be prevented. By getting to know others and learning about each other's backgrounds and customs, understanding and tolerance increase." (Schoolplan, School 5)

Finally, the physical learning environment is also highlighted as an important component. School 3, for example, describes how thoughtful spatial design can enhance both inspiration and self-regulation:

"A conscious choice was made for an open, flexible learning space with movable furniture and materials that can be used in various ways. There are areas for research as well as spaces for working with tools. Materials are neatly organized. This setup is inspiring (offering choice in materials) and at the same time promotes students' self-regulation." (Policy Plan, School 3)

## A personalized approach to student learning:

A personalized approach to student learning is fundamental in creating a supportive and effective educational environment. As highlighted in the policy document from School 2, it is important to monitor each student's development and offer tailored activities that challenge them appropriately:

"We monitor each student's individual development and involve them in activities that challenge and encourage them to learn at a level that suits them." (Schoolplan, School 2)

To effectively personalize education, it is crucial to regularly assess students and collaborate with other professionals to determine the most appropriate interventions. For example:

"Students who perform below or well above the group's average are discussed with the care coordinator. This involves evaluating which interventions can be made within the group. If these have little effect, a student may be placed on an individual learning path." (Schoolplan, School 2)

However, the balance between personalized approaches and group dynamics must be maintained. School 1 emphasizes the need to support both the individual and the group:

"We maintain a balance between an individual approach (learning in a way that suits the child) and teaching that allows children to experience the strength of the group." (School guide, School 1)

To monitor individual student progress, regular assessments are conducted. These assessments provide teachers with insights into their instructional effectiveness and the development of each child:

"At our school, regular assessments are conducted. They provide the class teachers with insight into the quality of their own teaching and the development the child is undergoing." (Schoolplan, School 2)

The results of these assessments are not only discussed among teachers but are also shared with students and parents, promoting a collaborative approach to student development:

"We track our children through child discussions, IEP-LVS (Insight into Own Profile Student Tracking System), group meetings, and Looqin (Social-Emotional Tracking System). During the child discussions, we talk with the children about their learning goals and progress. Children discuss with the group leader and during parent meetings whether the learning goals have been achieved... Test results from the IEP are also discussed with the children to assess their growth and to identify areas they want to work on in the coming period. In group meetings, the group leaders discuss with the internal coordinator how the development of the group and individual children is progressing." (Schoolguide, School 1)

When students' needs differ significantly from their peers, providing the appropriate materials and tailored support is essential. School 6 emphasizes the importance of adjusting instruction to accommodate the individual needs of students:

"In our teaching, we take differences into account and adjust our instruction, content, and pace accordingly. We offer personalized attention. For children with specific educational needs, we provide a wide range of support and materials for broadening and deepening their learning." (Schoolguide, School 6)

As discussed in earlier sections, offering multiple perspectives is key to fostering creativity and expanding students' learning experiences. School 4, for example, focuses on cultural activities throughout the year to broaden students' cultural awareness:

"For this reason, we focus on cultural activities throughout the entire school year. We keep in mind that these activities are aimed at increasing the children's cultural (self-)awareness, shifting the focus between their immediate world and the world that may seem distant to them." (Culture Plan, School 4)

Additionally, fostering intrinsic motivation is central to the personalized approach, as it encourages students to engage with the learning process on a deeper level. School 1 underscores the importance of tapping into students' natural curiosity and aligning education with their needs: "The development of the child is stimulated by making use of the talents already present within the child. We reflect on everyday matters. We professionally encourage the children to learn from intrinsic motivation; their own desire. In this way, we continue to take steps forward together." (Schoolguide, School 1)

Similarly, School 5 acknowledges that student motivation and engagement are key drivers of learning. By creating an environment that aligns with students' individual needs and encourages curiosity, the school fosters a deeper connection to the learning process:

"We recognize that students only learn when they are motivated and engaged. Our school provides an environment where this motivation and engagement are encouraged. We do this by involving students in the learning process, stimulating their curiosity, and aligning the education with their needs. Depending on their educational needs, our students receive different types of instruction, such as basic instruction, short instruction, or extended instruction. The forms of processing also depend on the students' educational needs and may vary. Collaborative learning and working together are encouraged." (Schoolplan, School 5)

## **Results - Interviews:**

# Overview:

In total, six interviews were conducted with the school director, cultural coordinator and for one the teacher of the project in question. The coding process is the same as with the policy documents and the same codes were used, no new codes derived from the data, although the distribution of the codes stemming from the interviews was different compared to the policy document analysis.

Curriculum and	Quotations	Understanding the	Quotations	Classroom and	Quotations
Content		Creative Process		Environment	
Challenging the	10	Creative Process	17	Creative	3
student				opportunities	
Chance for self-	11	Freedom to take	16	Diverse	11
expression		risks		approaches	
Curiosity	10	Learning process	2	Encouraged to	14
				make own	
				choices	
Freedom to	19	Models and/or	27	Intrinsic	8
explore		strategies		motivation	
High	1	Preparing for real	12	Personalized	21
expectations		life situations		approach	
Multiple	26			Physical	6
perspectives				environment	

## Table 2: Codes and quotations used in the interview analysis

Room for	16			Rewards?	16
student input					
Time for	20			Supportive	29
reflection				environment	
Total:	113	Total:	74	Total:	108

### 1. Curriculum and Content

Across the interviews, schools consistently reference creating space for students to be creative. This includes encouraging student input, providing opportunities for exploration, engaging with different perspectives, and incorporating reflection. Although approaches differ between schools, these strategies are commonly used to support student engagement and participation in their education.

### Room for student exploration and input:

Many schools emphasize the importance of allowing students room to explore, make choices, and express their interests. However, the level of autonomy granted often depends on the school's structure or the teacher's comfort with loosening control.

For example, one teacher from School 2 acknowledges that a more traditional, directive approach can limit exploratory learning:

"Yes, we are indeed a school with fairly traditional education, which is of course quite structured and directive." (Interview School 2)

Teachers in School 6 also reflect on how easy it is to fall back on full control, particularly when time is constrained or when the pressure to deliver structured content is high:

"We don't necessarily work with a fixed thematic structure... But it's very easy to overlook [exploration]. To just plan everything yourself and keep full control." "I would like to see children be able to make more of their own choices. Teachers often find it very difficult to let go..." (Interview School 6)

Time constraints play a significant role in limiting autonomy:

"We spend the whole morning on math and language... The afternoon only gives us about two effective hours... You have to fit in music, creativity, citizenship, English, science, and more." (Interview School 6)

By contrast, schools like School 1 and School 4 treat exploration and student-driven inquiry as core educational values:

"When children come up with questions, letting them search for the answers themselves—that's what our education is about." (Interview School 1) "Let it come from the children. Respond to what is really going on in your group." (Interview School 4)

Some schools implement structured methods to ensure student input is regularly heard, such as class meetings or student councils:

"The class meeting is actually also led by the children... Each class has its own chairperson, treasurer, and secretary." (Interview School 1) "We've had a student council for 2–3 years... You can really see a strong desire from the students to express themselves." (Interview School 6)

Other techniques—like using name sticks to ensure everyone contributes—help ensure quieter students are also heard:

"We have a jar with sticks labelled with names... This ensures that not just the ones who always shout 'me, me, me' get a turn, but also the students who are unsure or more timid." (Interview School 5)

Engaging with multiple perspectives

Creating opportunities for student agency also involves helping students see the world from different angles. Several schools actively foster perspective-taking as a way to build empathy, broaden understanding, and encourage collaborative decision-making.

School 1 integrates this idea into classroom discussions and decision-making activities:

"You teach them to see those perspectives, and to come to a consensus together... You learn that someone else can have a different opinion, and you learn to accept that." (Interview School 1)

Cultural exposure is another method for expanding students' perspectives. As mentioned by School 4:

"At first, some of the students weren't really curious... But if you take a moment beforehand to introduce them... then you can really shift their attitude and get them engaged." (Interview School 4)

In some schools, this kind of perspective work is built directly into curriculum materials. School 2, for instance, uses a language program called *Success for All*, which encourages students to engage with varied viewpoints:

"That's exactly when you're stimulated to think further—when you have to come up with multiple options... with a focus on creative thinking." (Interview School 2)

School 3 applies the STEAM approach to similarly encourage empathy and critical thinking:

"Those STEAM cards often show different people—what the teacher wants, what the principal wants, what the children want... From those perspectives..." (Interview School 3) Reflection across schools:

Reflection is another key part of fostering agency and self-awareness in students. All schools mention its importance, although the approaches taken by the schools and the amount of time dedicated to it vary.

At a basic level, most schools engage students in one-on-one or group discussions to talk about what is going well and where support is needed:

"What do you find easy? What are you struggling with? That's where the teacher can help you... That way, you start taking responsibility and gaining insight." (Interview School 2)

In some subjects, reflection is built into the lesson structure. However, its consistent application often depends on the teacher:

"In visual arts and cultural orientation, it really plays a central role. However, I also think it depends on the teacher... One might say, 'Great, they're done, on to the next lesson,' while another finds it important to reflect after every single lesson." (Interview School 4)

School 6 references using the ED-model, which includes a reflection step. However, in practice, this is sometimes neglected:

"It includes feedback and reflection, at least it should. But when I observe lessons from colleagues, I often see that it's missing." (Interview School 6)

## 2. Understanding the Creative Process

Across the interviews, it became evident that while fostering students' understanding of the creative process is not always a central or systematically implemented objective, various schools have incorporated methods and strategies aimed at supporting creativity in practice. Compared to the policy documents, the interviews revealed a broader range of practices intended to guide students through creative thinking and problem-solving, though these efforts vary significantly in scope and emphasis.

One example is the program *Success for All*, referenced by School 2, which is primarily a language instruction method but integrates elements of collaboration and creative thinking:

"Well, I think one of the best examples of this is Success for All. That's our language method... The approach to language education is actually shaped around youth literature. But indeed, independent work, collaboration, and creative thinking are very strongly encouraged within that." (Interview, School 2)

At School 4, the program *Laat maar leren* is used to support creative disciplines such as drama, writing, and visual arts. This approach prioritizes the creative process over the final product, encouraging student autonomy in determining when a task is complete:

"It's made very clear that if a child asks, 'Am I done?' or 'Do you like it?', you don't answer yes or no. You turn it back to them — 'When are you done? It's your artwork.'" (Interview, School 4)

At School 1, a similar approach is adopted, where teachers avoid providing models for students to copy, fostering individual creativity and reducing frustration:

"When you let kids copy, they think: 'It has to look like how the teacher did it.'... That's exactly what we want to avoid here." (Interview, School 1)

At School 3, a short-term creative exercise involves students developing a unique sound within a time constraint. This fosters experimentation and an appreciation for mistakes as part of the creative process. However, when such approaches are scaled up to larger projects, students often experience increased difficulty:

"Then they go ahead with it because they think: okay, this is just a practice, so it doesn't matter if it goes wrong. But as soon as they start working on an actual product, they find it a bit more difficult." (Interview School 3)

School 5 also engages students in activities that may cultivate creative thinking, although the focus is primarily on learning through play. Students are not explicitly made aware that these activities involve skill development:

"It's a learning process they're going through, while they think they're just having fun playing." (Interview, School 5)

In contrast, School 6 does not describe creativity-focused strategies as part of their general classroom instruction. Instead, efforts to promote creative thinking are limited to a specific group of students:

"For those more advanced children, it's done quite deliberately... but it's not something that's structurally embedded in the classroom as a whole." (Interview, School 6) Despite using the *Success for All* program, School 2's overall educational approach remains traditional, with creative strategies largely applied in enrichment classes:

"It could happen a bit more often, because it's quite teacher-directed... But in the enrichment class, that does happen." (Interview, School 2)

School 4 further supports creative thinking by assigning tasks that challenge students to think abstractly and break away from realism:

"Tasks where the assignment is specifically that it mustn't become something recognizable — they find that really difficult... It doesn't always have to be perfect." (Interview, School 4)

Finally, School 1 creates opportunities for public presentation through a weekly event where students can share creative work. Teachers support students in preparing for the challenges such presentations may bring:

"Of course — in the end, you do want it to be a success, right?... You support it, so that it becomes a positive experience for the child." (Interview, School 1)

## **3.** Classroom Environment

The importance of cultivating a supportive learning environment was a recurring theme across all interviews. Although this intersects with previously discussed elements such as reflection, creativity, and student agency—schools consistently emphasized the central role of social-emotional and psychological safety in the classroom. All participating schools underscored the significance of creating a safe space where students feel comfortable to participate, take risks, and express themselves. This commitment is evident both in their policy documents and in practice.

For instance, School 6 implements structured routines, such as the "golden weeks" and "silver weeks," to foster positive group dynamics at the start of the academic year:

"That's actually where we always start. We call it the golden weeks. During that time, we work on positive group dynamics so that it becomes a safe group something we actively build together with the children." (Interview, School 6)

While establishing safety is foundational, schools also engage in practices that go beyond it—emphasizing the learning process, promoting student expression, and recognizing student efforts. As discussed earlier, several schools adopt a process-oriented approach, particularly in creative subjects such as visual arts. Here, the focus is not on the final product but on exploration, experimentation, and skill development:

"Because we focus so strongly on the process during lessons — for example, in visual arts — children learn that it's not about creating a beautiful final product. It's much more about having an experience, or learning how to use a specific technique." (Interview, School 4) Student expression is also actively encouraged. At School 1, for example, students are given the opportunity each week to share something they are proud of or wish to discuss with their peers, contributing to both community building and student confidence:

"You present to each other what you've learned or done that week, or something you want to share... Often, texts are read aloud, written by the children themselves." (Interview, School 1)

Recognition and motivation play important roles in supporting student engagement. In some cases, this takes the form of extrinsic rewards for collective achievements. School 4, for example, employs class goals as a motivational tool:

"When we've worked really well ten times, then on Friday afternoon we get to go outside for extra playtime. That way, you really reinforce things positively, and they're working toward something themselves." (Interview, School 4)

However, educators also recognize the limitations of relying solely on extrinsic rewards. Instead, intrinsic motivation is seen as a more sustainable and meaningful driver of student engagement. One strategy used to cultivate this is the alignment of learning materials with students' interests. In School 2, the *Success for All* program uses children's literature to inspire assignments and enhance reading motivation:

"Exactly, yes, the reading motivation increases and from there the assignments are written." (Interview, School 2)

Supporting intrinsic motivation further involves offering differentiated instruction and personalized learning pathways. Several schools stress the importance of adapting to students' individual needs through continuous monitoring and support. School 5 highlights this personalized approach:

"So we look at the group that needs more challenge, we look at those who need more support... So for each objective we again look at the child: what does this mean for you?" (Interview, School 5)

Most schools provide this support through regular student-teacher dialogues, reflection exercises, and the use of student monitoring systems. School 1 extends this approach by granting students greater autonomy, offering freedom of choice in how and where they learn—within clearly defined boundaries:

"We give as much freedom as a child can handle... The space is very homely, with different types of workspaces. What belongs to the child is the ability to choose where they want to work." (Interview, School 1)

The physical learning environment is also seen as instrumental in supporting creativity and autonomy. Flexible and well-resourced classrooms offer students the opportunity to explore and engage with materials independently. As described by School 3, the learning space itself contributes to creative thinking:

"I try to create a structured chaos... It can definitely be a space where things are lying around, but everything must be organized well enough so you can find it again." (Interview, School 3)

### **Results - Summarizing**

In the **Content and Curriculum** domain, most schools provide space for exploration, reflection, and student input. Cultural activities such as museum visits and creative workshops are used to stimulate curiosity and expose students to new experiences. Some schools implement specific programs that align well with the framework. For instance, School 2's *Success for All* program integrates cooperative learning and creative thinking in a language-focused context, echoing similar approaches described by Marcos et al. (2020). School 1 adopts a broader educational philosophy that supports student agency and flexible learning paths, which indirectly but effectively supports creative development. School 3's project-based structure also offers a fertile ground for creative exploration, even if it does not represent a full-school model. Conversely, Schools 4 and 5 do not directly mention dedicated programs but foster creativity through frequent cultural exposure. School 6 appears to have the least developed curricular strategies for promoting creativity; while it does include student input through a student council and reflective practices in some areas, these are inconsistently applied.

In terms of **Understanding the Creative Process**, most schools express a desire to cultivate creative thinking, though the depth and structure of these efforts vary. Schools 1, 3, 4, and 5 emphasize a process-over-product approach, encouraging students to explore, take ownership, and avoid replicating models or teacher expectations. In contrast, Schools 2 and 6 provide support that is more limited. While School 2's *Success for All* program includes elements that challenge students to think outside conventional boundaries, the broader instructional approach remains largely traditional. At School 6, efforts to support students' understanding of the creative process appear limited to specific subgroups, with no clear school-wide implementation strategy.

Finally, all schools prioritize the creation of a supportive **Classroom Environment**, which is essential for fostering creativity. Across all cases, there is a shared emphasis on student safety, individual support, and emotional well-being. Each school tracks student progress and engages in dialogue to determine appropriate forms of guidance. However, implementation varies. School 1, for example, grants students' significant autonomy and flexibility in how and where they learn, enabling them to choose their working environments. School 3's project-based approach similarly emphasizes student freedom, with the teacher acting as facilitator rather than director. While the remaining schools maintain more traditional structures, Schools 4 and 5 adopt a more process-oriented pedagogical style compared to Schools 2 and 6.

### **Discussion:**

## Conclusions:

This thesis set out to explore how creativity is promoted within Dutch primary schools in the city of Groningen. Using a three-part theoretical framework—Content and Curriculum, Understanding the Creative Process, and Classroom Environment—the first research question aimed to identify both formal and informal strategies for fostering creativity in primary educational settings.

Despite the limited explicit focus on creativity in policy documents, the data gathered from interviews illustrates that creativity is indeed being promoted—though often implicitly—across the primary schools studied. Educators describe a range of practices that align with the three elements of the theoretical framework, even if these practices were not originally intended to serve that purpose.

First, within the **Content and Curriculum**, schools create space for exploratory learning, cultural exposure, and student-led activities. These approaches enable pupils to engage with new materials and express themselves in ways that support creative development. Although not all schools implement formal programs dedicated to creativity, many integrate creative opportunities through other subject areas, particularly in language and cultural education. However, teachers and schools may also be influenced by the need to conform to traditional educational practices and the pressure of meeting numerous demands and requirements.

Second, with respect to **Understanding the Creative Process**, while explicit strategies are limited in school policies, several schools emphasize process over product in their teaching practices. This includes encouraging experimentation, valuing originality, and helping students reflect on their own work rather than meeting predetermined standards. These methods suggest a growing awareness among educators of the importance of

supporting students' ability to think creatively, even if such goals are not formally codified. For some schools, however, attention to this subject is limited or only directed toward specific groups.

Finally, in terms of the **Classroom Environment**, all schools place strong emphasis on creating a safe, supportive space in which students feel free to take risks, explore ideas, and engage in self-directed learning. This includes adapting to individual needs, promoting autonomy, and maintaining open communication with students about their progress. Such environments are essential for fostering the confidence and curiosity that underlie creative thought.

In sum, although the promotion of creativity is not always articulated as an explicit or central objective in school policy, it is often fostered through everyday pedagogical practices. However, these efforts can be constrained by external pressures, such as curricular demands and the tendency among teachers or other professionals to conform to standardized expectations. Moreover, creativity-enhancing activities are sometimes offered as supplementary programs targeted at specific groups—such as gifted students—rather than being integrated into the core educational experience.

The research identifies a variety of ways in which creativity is being promoted within the participating Dutch primary schools. These findings also begin to address the second research question: how is policy aimed at promoting creativity implemented in primary schools? This question proves difficult to answer definitively, as most schools do not have explicit policies dedicated to fostering creativity. While many schools express an intention to support creativity or creative thinking, this is often framed as a secondary outcome of broader educational policies rather than as a distinct objective. In line with Fixsen et al.'s (2005) model, effective policy implementation requires clear goals, resource allocation, and strategic frameworks—elements largely absent from the reviewed policy documents. From this

perspective, it appears that the first stage of implementation—paper implementation—has not been meaningfully initiated in most cases.

However, this conclusion must be nuanced. While explicit creativity policies may be lacking, the data reveals that schools are implementing various practices that align with creativity-enhancing principles. For instance, the widely used process-over-product approach represents a clearly implemented strategy. Interviews indicate that this approach is wellintegrated into practice: educators are knowledgeable about its pedagogical value, and classroom environments are designed to support it. This suggests that, at least for this element, schools have reached the stage of performance implementation.

Conversely, in other areas—such as reflective practices—there is evidence of inconsistency. One school, for example, reported that although reflection is formally embedded in the curriculum, teachers do not consistently apply it in practice. This reflects a gap in implementation fidelity.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that schools are mandated by the government to provide a safe and supportive environment (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2025). The same can be argued for the described personalized approach being part of inclusive education, which is being promoted by the government (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2024). As such, the establishment of a supportive environment and personalized approach cannot (solely) be considered a deliberate part of the strategy to foster creativity. Furthermore, the goals of inclusive education might not fully align with the goals of fostering creativity and thus minimize effects in this department. Additionally, budgeting might make it difficult to achieve the desired personalized approach.

These findings underscore the challenge of identifying and evaluating creativitypromoting efforts when they are embedded in broader policies without explicit framing.

#### Recommendations:

Building on these findings, several recommendations emerge for strengthening the promotion of creativity in Dutch primary education. First, schools would benefit from adopting a more deliberate and integrated approach to creativity in both policy formulation and classroom implementation. While many practices that support creativity are already in place, they are often applied without clear articulation or intentional framing. By making creative learning strategies more explicit—both in formal policy documents and in everyday teaching—schools could foster student creativity more consistently. This intentional focus would not only enhance the quality and coherence of creative development across classrooms, but also enable clearer evaluation of implementation processes and educational outcomes, ensuring better alignment with overarching educational goals.

Second, targeted pre-service and in-service professional development is essential. Training professionals is also described by Boekaerts and Minnaert (2005) as a crucial component of successful implementation, particularly in helping educators shift their practices. In this context, training focused on how to support students in understanding the creative process—an area currently underrepresented in both policy and practice—could significantly enhance teachers' ability to foster deep, reflective creative engagement. Given the successful implementation of approaches such as "process over product," building on these existing strengths through focused capacity-building appears both feasible and impactful.

Third, integrating creativity into curriculum documents and school development plans is critical. As long as creativity remains an incidental or secondary objective, it is difficult to evaluate implementation fidelity or scale up successful practices. By explicitly embedding creativity as a learning goal, schools can move from isolated efforts to a coherent, schoolwide approach. This would also enable more systematic monitoring and support, ensuring that

creative development is not limited to certain programs, teachers, or student groups—such as those designed specifically for gifted students. While targeted initiatives are valuable, a more inclusive strategy ensures that all learners have equitable access to creativity-enhancing opportunities.

Finally, schools and policymakers should consider adopting a structured implementation framework—such as that proposed by Fixsen et al. (2005)—to guide the development, rollout, and evaluation of creativity-focused initiatives. Doing so would provide a roadmap for translating and bootstrapping intentions into sustained practice, from the early stages of policy formulation to full performance-level implementation. In this way, creative education can become a durable and equitable feature of all students' learning experiences.

## Limitations and directions for future research

The theoretical framework developed for this study offered a useful foundation for analysing how creativity is promoted in primary school settings. Many of the observed practices and policies aligned well with the framework's three domains—Content and Curriculum, Understanding the Creative Process, and Classroom Environment—and could be meaningfully interpreted through this lens. However, distinguishing clearly between the domains of Content and Curriculum and Classroom Environment proved challenging in several instances. Certain elements—such as teaching strategies or classroom organization appeared to straddle both domains, complicating categorization. As such, future research applying this framework may benefit from refining these two domains to improve analytical clarity.

In addition, the framework could be expanded to include school-wide participation structures, such as student councils or participatory planning processes, which may also influence creative development either directly or indirectly (Mannion et al., 2020). These

mechanisms represent an important dimension of school life that may intersect with creative opportunities but are not currently captured in the existing framework.

Beyond the framework itself, broader challenges persist in creativity research. While this study draws on established theories regarding the conditions that support creativity, many of the proposed strategies have not yet been empirically validated in primary education settings. Moreover, creativity as a construct remains complex and contested—its definitions, mechanisms, and measurability continue to be debated within the academic community (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018). These conceptual uncertainties mean that findings and recommendations presented here should be interpreted with caution. Further empirical research is needed to better understand which interventions are most effective for fostering creativity, and under what conditions.

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# Appendix 1A: Interview guide – as used in Dutch

Interviewleidraad (standaard)

Beleidsdocumenten:

•

Curriculum and content:

- In hoeverre wordt er in de lesplannen ruimte gemaakt voor reflectie en zelf expressie?
- Op welke manier worden leerlingen gestimuleerd dingen vanuit verschillende perspectieven te bekijken?
- In hoeverre is er ruimte voor leerlingen om dingen uit eigen initiatief te onderzoeken?
- In hoeverre worden leerlingen uitgedaagd om zelf vragen te stellen?

Understanding the Creative Process:

- In hoeverre worden leerlingen strategieën aangeleerd om te helpen met creatief denken?
- In hoeverre wordt leerlingen aangeleerd om "out of the box" te denken
- In hoeverre wordt leerlingen geleerd over potentiële barrières die creatief denken in de weg kunnen zitten? ? Zoals: dit is wat ik gewend ben of is dit zoals het hoort of is dat niet raar?
- Op welke manier maken leerlingen kennis met situatie uit het dagelijkse leven en de uitdaging die hierbij komt kijken? Vooral met betrekking tot uitdagingen op het gebied van creativiteit. En op welke manier worden ze hier op voorbereid?

# Classroom Environment

- In hoeverre is er een persoonlijke aanpak per leerling?
- Op welke manier wordt er met beloningen / beoordelingen omgegaan op jullie school?
- In hoeverre worden leerlingen uitgedaagd om zelf naar antwoorden op vragen te zoeken?

# Appendix 1B: Interview guide – translated to English

Interview Guide (Standard)

Policy Documents:

•

# Curriculum and Content:

- To what extent is space created in lesson plans for reflection and self-expression?
- In what ways are students encouraged to view things from different perspectives?
- To what extent do students have the opportunity to explore topics on their own initiative?
- To what extent are students challenged to ask their own questions?

# **Understanding the Creative Process:**

- To what extent are students taught strategies to support creative thinking?
- To what extent are students taught to think "outside the box"?
- To what extent are students made aware of potential barriers to creative thinking?
  (e.g., "This is what I'm used to," or "Is this how it's supposed to be?" or "Isn't that weird?")
- In what ways are students introduced to real-life situations and the challenges that come with them especially those involving creativity? And how are they prepared to deal with these challenges?

# **Classroom Environment:**

• To what extent is there a personalized approach for each student?

Martin Westerbroek, s3360881

- How are rewards and assessments handled at your school?
- To what extent are students encouraged to find answers to questions independently?

## Appendix 2: Data management plan

### Data Management Plan Thesis Martin Westerbroek

#### Part 1. Version and date

Version 1 ; 20-1-2025

### Part 2. Agreements

There are no external partners for this research. No personal data will be shared with outside sources except for the researcher.

#### Part 3. Personal data

- (a) Names of participants and school names will be processed during the study.
- (b) During part 5 of the process, the data preparation, the personal data will be anonymised by listing the schools as school A, B, C etcetera and the names as school leader A, B or C etcetera when they come up in the transcribing process.

#### Part 4. Data collection

- (a) This research includes the collection of new data, namely policy documents from primary schools, some of which will be publicly accessible on their websites, some of which will be asked for from the school director. Furthermore data will be obtained from interviews with the school directors of said primary schools which will be recorded if permission is given by the interviewee.
- (b) The raw data, e.g. policy documents will be stored in a Y-drive (gmw student/staff creativity and creative thinking) of the RUG. The interview recording will be done with recording devices provided by the RUG, the data of which will be automatically uploaded to the aforementioned secured Y-drive of the RUG. Also the informed consent forms will be saved on the Y-drive, when requested participant will receive a physical copy, other physical copies will be destroyed.
- (c) The supervisor Alexander Minnaert and the researcher Martin Westerbroek will have access to the raw data.

#### Part 5. Data preparation (for analysis, e.g. transcription, translation, aggregation...)

- (a) Transcription of the interviews will take place, this will be written using Word and stored on the Ydrive (gmw – student/staff – creativity and creative thinking), which only the PI and the researcher have access to. When necessary relevant quotes will be translated using DeepL.
- (b) The transcription and translation of the data will be worked on using Word and backed up every time it is worked on the Y-drive. A separate linking file will be made so it will be possible to retrace participants to pseudonyms in case they want their data removed.
- (c) The supervisor Alexander Minnaert and the researcher Martin Westerbroek will have access to the raw data.

#### Part 6. Data analysis

- (a) The data will coded and analysed using qualitative content analysis techniques. Atlas.ti will be used for the coding.
- (b) The coding will take place on Atlas and the raw codes and code tree will be backed up to the Ydrive (gmw – student/staff – creativity and creative thinking).
- (c) The supervisor Alexander Minnaert and the researcher Martin Westerbroek will have access to the raw data.

### Part 7. Data retention

(a) The raw data, prepared data and analysed data will follow the Faculty Data Storage Protocol, so for 10 years.

### Part 8. Data sharing

- (a) No external partners will receive raw data. Prepared and analysed data can be shared upon request for validation and/or follow-up studies.
- (b) Requests for data sharing will be assessed firstly by supervisor Alexander Minnaert and secondly the researcher Martin Westerbroek

#### Part 9. Data publication

- (a) The raw, prepared and analysed data will not be made publicly available.
- (b) Primarily the supervisor Alexander Minnaert, but also the researcher Martin Westerbroek are responsible for the data. The supervisor Alexander Minnaert, but also the Martin Westerbroek can be contacted for questions.
- (c) FAIR principles will not be applied to the data.

# **Appendix 3: Informed Consent form**

# **GEÏNFORMEERDE TOESTEMMING**

### "EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SCHOOL POLICIES IN PROMOTING CREATIVITY AND CREATIVE THINKING SKILLS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES PED-2425-S-0064

- Ik heb de informatie over het onderzoek gelezen. Ik heb genoeg gelegenheid gehad om er vragen over te stellen.
- Ik begrijp waar het onderzoek over gaat, wat er van me gevraagd wordt, welke gevolgen deelname kan hebben, hoe er met mijn gegevens wordt omgegaan, en wat mijn rechten als deelnemer zijn.
- Ik begrijp dat deelname aan het onderzoek vrijwillig is. Ik kies er zelf voor om mee te doen. Ik kan op elk moment stoppen met meedoen. Als ik stop, hoef ik niet uit te leggen waarom. Stoppen zal geen negatieve gevolgen voor mij hebben.
- Ik geef hieronder aan waar ik toestemming voor geef.

## Toestemming voor deelname aan het onderzoek:

[] Ja, ik geef toestemming voor deelname; deze toestemming loopt tot 01-08-2025

[] Nee, ik geef geen toestemming voor deelname

Toestemming voor het maken van audio/video-opnames tijdens het onderzoek:

[] Ja, ik geef toestemming voor het maken van audio-opnames van mij als deelnemer.

[] Nee, ik geef geen toestemming voor het maken van audio-opnames van mij.

## Toestemming voor de verwerking van mijn persoonsgegevens:

[] Ja, ik geef toestemming voor de verwerking van mijn persoonsgegevens zoals vermeld in de onderzoeksinformatie. Ik weet dat ik tot 01-05-2025 kan vragen om mijn gegevens te laten verwijderen. Ook als ik besluit om te stoppen met deelname, kan ik hierom vragen. [] Nee, ik geef geen toestemming voor de verwerking van mijn persoonsgegevens.

Toestemming voor het delen van mijn gegevens voor vervolgonderzoek:

[] Ja, ik geef toestemming voor het hergebruik van mijn persoonsgegevens voor vervolgonderzoek zoals vermeld in de onderzoeksinformatie.

[] Nee, ik geef geen toestemming voor het hergebruik van mijn persoonsgegevens voor vervolgonderzoek zoals vermeld in de onderzoeksinformatie.

Volledige naam deelnemer:	Handtekening deelnemer:	Datum:

Volledige naam aanwezige onderzoeker:	Handtekening onderzoeker:	Datum:

De aanwezige onderzoeker verklaart dat de deelnemer uitvoerig over het onderzoek is geïnformeerd.

U heeft recht op een kopie van dit toestemmingsformulier.

# **Appendix 4: Informed Consent Letter**

# INFORMATIE OVER HET ONDERZOEK

## VERSIE VOOR DEELNEMERS **"Exploring the Role of School Policies in Promoting Creativity and Creative Thinking Skills in Primary Education: A Qualitative Study of Implementation Practices"** PED-2425-S-0064

## • Waarom krijg ik deze informatie?

- U wordt uitgenodigd om mee te doen aan dit onderzoek naar het promoten van creativiteit in basisscholen. U bent een schoolleider of iemand betrokken bij het beleidsproces van een basisschool en daarom achten we u geschikt om te vertellen in hoeverre jullie school hier wel of niet mee bezig is.
- Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd voor een scriptie van de master Youth (0-21), Society and Policy, welke wordt gegeven aan de faculteit Gedrag en Maatschappijwetenschappen van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. De onderzoeker is Martin Westerbroek en hij wordt begeleid door prof. dr. A.E.M.G. (Alexander) Minnaert.

## • Moet ik meedoen aan dit onderzoek?

Meedoen aan het onderzoek is vrijwillig. Wel is uw toestemming nodig. Lees deze informatie daarom goed door. Stel alle vragen die u misschien heeft, bijvoorbeeld omdat u iets niet begrijpt. Pas daarna besluit u of u wilt meedoen. Als u besluit om niet mee te doen, hoeft u niet uit te leggen waarom, en zal dit geen negatieve gevolgen voor u hebben. Dit recht geldt op elk moment, dus ook nadat u hebt toegestemd in deelname aan het onderzoek.

## • Waarom dit onderzoek?

• Het doel van dit onderzoek is om te onderzoeken hoe scholen beleid formuleren en implementeren om creativiteit en creatieve denkvaardigheden te bevorderen. Daarnaast richt het onderzoek zich op de effectiviteit van de uitvoering van dit beleid en of deze aanpakken meetbare resultaten opleveren. Het onderzoek zal specifiek kijken naar het basisonderwijs, omdat creatieve denkvaardigheden het beste op jonge leeftijd kunnen worden ontwikkeld.

## • Wat vragen we van u tijdens het onderzoek?

- Ten eerste vragen we u of u mee wilt werken aan dit onderzoek. Hiervoor willen we u vragen het bijgevoegde "geïnformeerde toestemming" formulier te ondertekenen.
- Vervolgens vragen wij u ten eerste of u (relevante) beleidsdocumenten heeft en die met ons kan delen zodat deze geanalyseerd kunnen worden. Dit kan simpelweg door deze documenten te versturen via de mail. Ook willen we u vragen of u mee wilt werken aan een interview aangaande het promoten van creativiteit op de basisschool en aangaande uw beleidsdocumenten en hoe de uitvoering van dit beleid er voor staat. Als u hiertoe bereid bent zullen we gezamenlijk zoeken naar een geschikt moment en zal de onderzoeker (Martin Westerbroek) bij u langskomen om u te interviewen.
- Wanneer u daar toestemming voor geeft zal het interview worden opgenomen, zodat achteraf het interview op papier gezet kan worden en verder geanalyseerd kan worden. Op deze manier kan er een meer waarheidsgetrouw en meer gedetailleerd beeld worden gemaakt dan met enkel aantekeningen van het interview. Het interview zal naar verwachting 30-45 minuten duren.
- Voor deelname aan dit onderzoek zult u geen vergoeding ontvangen.

# • Welke gevolgen kan deelname hebben?

• Door deelname aan dit onderzoek zijn er geen directe voordelen voor u als deelnemer te behalen. Het is mogelijk dat de kennis over het bevorderen van creativiteit en het evalueren van uw beleid ook voor u als deelnemer relevant is, maar dit kan niet worden gegarandeerd.

• Ook worden er geen negatieve gevolgen verwacht door deelname aan dit onderzoek, enkel dat het u het een en ander tijd zal kosten.

## • Hoe gaan we met uw gegevens om?

- Het voornaamste doel van dit onderzoek is ter opleiding van de student en het schrijven van een these.
- Tijdens dit onderzoek worden verschillende soorten gegevens verwerkt, namelijk beleidsdocumenten en informatie over beleid verkregen door een interview. Deze gegevens zullen worden getranscribeerd, gecodeerd en geanalyseerd door de onderzoeker Martin Westerbroek. Tijdens het onderzoek/interview zullen hoogstwaarschijnlijk naam en schoolnaam benoemd worden. Bij het verwerken van de gegevens zullen uw naam en schoolnaam worden gepseudonimiseerd door de naam en schoolnaam te vervangen door bijvoorbeeld school A of B, hetzelfde geldt voor uw naam. Hierbij zal ook de koppeling tussen identiteit van de deelnemers en hun gegevens verwijderd worden, dit zal naar verwachting rond 01-04-2025 plaatsvinden. Tot hier is het dus ook mogelijk voor u om uw gegevens in te zien en eventueel te laten verwijderen. Hierna zal het niet langer mogelijk zijn om uw gegevens in te zien en/of te laten verwijderen.
- Aan het einde van het onderzoek (naar verwachting 01-07-2025) zullen alle persoonlijke gegevens verwijderd worden. De gepseudonimiseerde gegevens blijven volgens de richtlijnen van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen 10 jaar lang bewaard. Deze gepseudonimiseerde gegevens kunnen mogelijk gedeeld worden voor hergebruik met personen buiten het onderzoeksteam voor verder onderzoek zolang hier door de deelnemer toestemming voor gegeven wordt.
- Onderzoeksresultaten en de daar bijhorende these zal worden gedeeld met begeleiders en zal worden gepubliceerd in de database van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

## • Wat moet u nog meer weten?

U kunt altijd vragen stellen over het onderzoek: nu, tijdens het onderzoek, en na afloop. Dit kan door de supervisor te benaderen op het mailadres a.e.m.g.minnaert@rug.nl of een van de betrokken onderzoekers te e-mailen m.westerbroek.1@student.rug.nl of te bellen 0611682025, of door een aanwezige onderzoeker aan te spreken.

Heeft u vragen/zorgen over uw rechten als onderzoeksdeelnemer of de uitvoering van het onderzoek? U kunt hierover ook contact opnemen met de Ethische Commissie Gedrags- en Maatschappijwetenschappen van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen: <u>ec-bss@rug.nl</u>.

Heeft u vragen of zorgen over hoe er met uw persoonsgegevens wordt omgegaan? U kunt hierover ook contact opnemen met de Functionaris Gegevensbescherming van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen: <u>privacy@rug.nl</u>.

Als onderzoeksdeelnemer heeft u recht op een kopie van deze onderzoeksinformatie.