

The Arts for *Every* Child

Why arts education is a social justice issue

Foreword

Every child should have access to arts and culture, and to the benefits that access brings. The arts are a positive force in society: children feel more confident in their ability to create, challenge and explore, to be part of society, and to make change happen. The arts empower children. They contribute to the development of all aspects of a child's potential and personality: studying the arts fosters creativity, innovation, empathy, and resilience. The arts enrich young lives, making them happier and healthier.

Access to the arts is access to our national life, and it is a social justice issue.

A school that is rich in the arts enhances the life chances of a child: a wealth of research shows that children with an arts deficit experience disadvantages educationally and economically, while their more fortunate peers are more resilient, healthier, do better in school, are more likely to vote, to go to university, to get a job and to keep it. Participation in the arts can fuel social mobility, so equality of access should be unaffected by class, income, race, disability, or location. For many children, school may be the first and only place that they are able to access arts, so it is critical that we remain vigilant in protecting this right for all children.

Whilst we welcome the September 2019 change to the Ofsted framework, we know that currently the study of arts subjects is in decline in state schools. Arts GCSE entries have fallen significantly since 2010, as have the number of hours the arts are taught in secondary schools and the number of arts teachers. Meanwhile independent schools, recognising the value to their pupils, continue to offer a broad and balanced, arts-rich education, reinforcing the inequality in the education system and in society more widely. As things stand, we are facing the possibility that arts subjects will become the preserve only of those who can afford them.

Whether we are talking about one day having jobs in the creative industries, what it takes to build sustainable communities, or about their future personal wellbeing, the arts give children skills for life. Creativity, imagination, an appreciation of form and narrative, and the ability to express emotion and complexity help them deal with tough circumstances, and to see and navigate new horizons; they are an important part of what prepares them for the world beyond school; and for some, they are a vital refuge from challenges we can only imagine. We cannot allow the current inequity of provision to continue, or to grow: we have to rebalance the offer so that every child is given access to the essential skills and opportunities that the arts can provide in their lives.

Moira Sinclair

Chief Executive, Paul Hamlyn Foundation

‘By identifying access to and participation in the arts, culture and heritage as an aspect of social justice itself and a powerful weapon against poverty, in all its manifest forms, the Welsh Government has made it clear that it understands the role played by culture in making us the sort of people we are and the people we want to be.’

Baroness Andrews (2014) *Culture and Poverty* a report for the Welsh Government

Health & Wellbeing

In the first year of primary school over one in five children are overweight or obese, with more children in England’s most deprived areas being overweight or obese than those in the most affluent areas (Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health, 2017). Young people are also twice as likely to report feeling depressed or anxious now as in the 1980s (Nuffield Foundation, 2012), with an average of three children in every classroom having a diagnosable mental health problem (Young Minds, 2019).

The arts have a role to play in physical health and mental wellbeing. There is growing evidence of the impact of the arts in improving mental and physical health, with study after study finding that health and wellbeing are improved by taking part in arts activities.¹

‘Some of the young people we met were ... very clear that their lack of curriculum choice in school added to their stress and that they had no creative or technical outlets to express themselves. They cited that the relentless focus on EBacc subjects did not suit all of them and led to low self-esteem and unhappiness.’

Education and Health and Social Care Committees (2018) *The Government’s Green Paper on mental health: failing a generation*

‘Nearly half (45%) [of 1,492 students sampled] say that engagement in the arts helps them relax and reduces stress. This is particularly the case for females (53%) and for sixth form students (49%).’

University of Nottingham/RSC/Tate (2018) *Time to Listen: Evidence from the Tracking Arts Learning and Engagement [TALE] Project*

Employability

The CBI (2018) is clear that the attitudes and aptitudes which are the biggest drivers of success for young people are resilience, enthusiasm, and creativity. Employers from across the economy report that the Fourth Industrial Revolution will require 21st-century skills like decision-making, team-working, flexibility and originality – all skills that are developed by studying the arts.²

The evidence base is clear: studying arts subjects develops students’ confidence, resilience and the soft skills in demand from employers. If arts access in schools continues to decline, we risk disadvantaged young people being locked out of employment opportunities due to a skills deficit.

‘Essential life skills such as confidence, motivation, resilience and communication are associated with better academic outcomes and better prospects in the workplace, and there is an increasing emphasis on their value, given labour market trends towards automation.’

Sutton Trust (2017) *Life Lessons*

‘Government should invest more in “STEAM” skills that will be most useful to people in this increasingly automated world. This means focusing more on STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), but also exploring how art and design (the “A” in “STEAM”) can feature at the heart of innovation.’

PwC (2018) *UK Economic Outlook*

Citizenship & diversity

The arts also create a culture of citizenship, tolerance and empathy, enabling young people to appreciate difference and diversity. Studies have shown that children who take part in regular arts activities show significant improvement in social cohesion, cooperation and pro-social attitudes (Schellenberg, et al. 2015). Children who engage in the arts are more likely to volunteer and to vote (CLA, 2017). We need future citizens who can engage with major global challenges – and we will need a diverse array of artists who can produce the art which will inspire and challenge us. If we want our creative industries to flourish, then we also need to ensure that their workforce is not drawn from one, more affluent, tier of society, but is reflective of the diverse world we live in.

‘Young people from less well-off backgrounds in particular don’t have access to the benefits that enrichment activities outside the classroom can bring, such as debating, volunteering and the performing arts. We need to ensure we close these gaps in access, so life skills can be harnessed as a driver of social mobility.’

Sir Peter Lampl, *Lessons for Life*, Sutton Trust blog. 12 October 2017

‘Taking part in the arts provides an effective bridge to higher aspirations and achievement for kids.’

Ric Lewis, Co-Chief Executive & Chairman of Tristan Capital Partners, Chairman The Black Heart Foundation & Chairman The Institute of Imagination

Economic growth

If we care about social mobility and child wellbeing then we need every child to have an arts-rich education. But there is also a strong economic growth imperative: the creative economy accounts for one in 11 jobs across the UK and the creative industries generate around £101 billion per annum, making up more than 5% of the UK’s economy (DCMS, 2018). This is bigger than the automotive, life sciences, aerospace, oil and gas sectors combined. Research has found that 87% of jobs in the creative economy are at no or low risk of automation, compared to 40% of other jobs (Bakhshi, et al. 2015). Poor children are better prepared for the future job market if they have the creative skills that an arts-rich education will give them.

‘In the Fourth Industrial Revolution, art may become more important than maths. We often talk about soft skills as being social and emotional skills, and hard skills as being science and maths, but it might be the opposite. The science and maths might become a lot softer in the future, where the relevance of knowledge evaporates very quickly, whereas the hard skills might be your curiosity, leadership, persistence and resilience.’

Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, OECD. 26 February 2019, Education Select Committee

The arts for every child

If we are to give every child and young person a broad and balanced curriculum that fulfils their potential; the skills required by employers for a 21st-century labour market that places a high premium on creativity; and a cultural education – which is their right, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – then we have to act now to reverse the decline.

We must work together – policy makers, schools, teachers, artists and cultural organisations – to ensure that every child and young person can access a broad and balanced curriculum that enables them to fulfil their potential, and which gives them the skills needed for the future. Otherwise the arts become the preserve of only those who can afford them.

‘There is growing evidence that accumulating essential life skills as well as social and cultural capital is instrumental to future life prospects.’

Lee Elliot Major and Stephen Machin (2018) *Social Mobility: And Its Enemies*

‘We are deeply concerned by the evidence we received around the downgrading of arts subjects in schools, with all the consequent implications for children’s development, wellbeing, experiences, careers and, ultimately, life chances.’

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2019) *Changing Lives: the social impact of participation in culture and sport*

‘In a few of the schools visited, lower-attaining pupils did not have any opportunity to study a language or some arts subjects, as the school directed them onto a pathway that excluded the subject as an option, in some cases from the age of 12. It is a risk to social mobility if pupils miss out on opportunities to study subjects and gain knowledge that could be valuable in subsequent stages of education or in later life.’

Amanda Spielman, Chief Inspector, Ofsted, *HMCI's commentary: recent primary and secondary curriculum research* (October 2017)

References

- ¹ Schellenberg, et al. (2015). Connolly, et al. (2011). Merrell & Tymms (2002). Catterall & Peppler (2007). Roden, et al. (2016). Hughes & Wilson (2004)
- ² Schellenberg, et al. (2015). Hui, et al. (2015). Schellenberg (2004). Lobo & Winsler (2006). Martin, et al. (2013). Connolly, et al. (2011). Merrell & Tymms (2002). Catterall & Peppler (2007)
- Bakhshi, et al. (2015) *Creativity vs Robots*
- CBI (2018) *Educating for the Modern World: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Annual Report*
- CLA (2017) *Key Research Findings: the case for cultural learning*
- Nuffield Foundation (2012) *Social trends and mental health: introducing the main findings*
- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2017) *State of Child Health Report*
- Schellenberg, et al. (2015) ‘Group Music Training and Children’s Prosocial Skills’
- Young Minds (2019) *Mental Health Statistics*
- Full references available: www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/briefings
- This is one of a series of CLA Briefing Papers available on the CLA website:
- No. 1 STEAM:**
Why STEM can only take us so far
- No. 2 Employability & Enterprise:**
Why the arts make us more employable, and why the creative industries are our economic life raft
- No. 3 Arts, Health & Wellbeing:**
Why the arts make us happier and healthier
- No. 4 The Arts in Schools:**
Why the arts matter in our education system