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Chapter 16

Creative Pedagogy for Empowerment: Holistic learning through expressive arts

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Introduction

Though the commitment to progression within traditional core academic subjects remains a central tenet within contemporary curricula, opportunities for children and young people to develop their holistic capacities is internationally recognised as pivotal in enabling them to participate as citizens within transitional societies. Arts educationalists challenge the continued dominance of cognitive domains of learning within education, citing the importance of creative and cultural pedagogy to empower diverse learners with the holistic knowledge and skills required to contribute to contemporary global political, economic and cultural shifts.

While creative and cultural learning can potentially occur across the curriculum, the expressive arts offer an interdisciplinary focus where the generating of qualitative outcomes provides an alternative to prioritisation of test and examination scores. Recognition of the holistic value of creative and cultural experiences challenges the endemic shift towards early specialism, with its consequent narrowing of focus potentially impoverishing young people's life experiences, restricting their access to wider knowledge, skills and aspirations.

This chapter will explore the potential of expressive arts in empowering learners, building key interdisciplinary skills to support holistic learning agendas of equity, pluralism and citizenship. It will initially discuss key policies and literature impacting on the role of expressive arts education within contemporary curricula. An overview of previous policies and practice provides a framework of the role of arts education in promoting interdisciplinary holistic learning. Case study evidence based on interdisciplinary cultural partnerships models creative pedagogical strategies for inclusion and empowerment within an international context.

Expressive arts within a test-based curriculum

The relative value of disciplines and subjects within the curriculum is contested, with debates around the political and social adjustment elicited by governmental changes. Consensus on what constitutes a balanced curriculum is culturally and ideologically constructed amidst wider concerns about economic and social stability, and growth (see Chapter 13). Global comparisons of educational systems are disseminated through statistical data evaluating the impact of countries' educational systems on their population. *The International Education Database* which measures and ranks the impact of global education systems 'in stabilizing their economy, and in developing their social environment' (2019), ranks the United Kingdom (UK) as 21st in a global evaluation of over two hundred countries based on meeting economic and social targets. UNESCO's statistics (2015) evaluating countries' achievements based on indices of equality and access related to its Education Development Index (EDI) are based on four indices: primary education, adult literacy, quality of education and gender.

While international data on educational quality are predicated on wider indices of value, the UK Governmental requirement is to quantify and evidence students' attainment within the core academic subjects, prioritising the demonstration of learners' cognitive and deductive capacities. Standard Attainment Test (SATs) provide assessment data for English, Mathematics and Science at 7 and 11 years, at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Research by the National Union of Teachers critiqued this testing and accountability culture as instigating a narrow curriculum, 'a loss of creativity; an emphasis on uniformity; a decline in the quality of personal relationships' (Hutchings, 2015:10). The Education Select Committee's Primary Assessment Report found that links between test results and the accountability system, pressurised the progress and attainment of students. It claimed 'the high stakes system can negatively impact teaching and learning, leading to narrowing of the curriculum and 'teaching to the test', as well as affecting teacher and pupil wellbeing' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017:3).

Despite such concerns, SATs results are promoted as a prerequisite in identifying children's capacity to meet required standards for their age range. Conservative Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, argued that SATs tests assessed the competence of schools, 'to check up on the system – and those who oversee it on your

behalf” (Hinds, 2019). Both parents and professional associations expressed concerns over subjecting children to a regime of testing under the guise of monitoring the quality of the education system. Parents responded by boycotting their children’s test attendance, and teachers’ associations balloted members for agreement in formally boycotting the 2020 SATs (Weale, 2019).

At secondary level the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) (Gov.UK, 2019) measures students’ performance in government-funded schools at GCSE level (16 years) in five core academic subjects: English, mathematics, history or geography, sciences, and a language. While schools can additionally offer: creative and cultural subjects, technology and religious education, nearly 90 per cent of school leaders argued that the privileging of traditional academic subjects in the EBacc narrows the curriculum (ASCL, 2015). The campaigning movement *Bacc For the Future* (2019), supported by creative businesses, education bodies, organisations and over 100,000 individuals, critiques EBacc’s devaluing of creative, artistic and technical subjects. It contends they are essential for the economy and that holistic learning and wellbeing should be given parity with core subjects. It argues that EBacc effectively excludes arts, creative and technical subjects from counting towards the Government’s secondary schools’ monitoring and accountability system: Progress 8 and Attainment 8.

The Progress 8 system provides a metric for evaluating performance of the prescribed EBacc curriculum across a range of schools and contexts. It purports ‘to prompt and promote self-improvement, to inform the public and stakeholders, and to provide credible information to enable action in cases of underperformance’ (DfE 2019: 6). However, its quantitative approach to assessing students’ achievement through ‘subject buckets’ with reduced weighting allocated to subjects listed as non-academic and unapproved has been critiqued as reductionist, lowering the status of creative and technical subjects, and impacting on their recruitment. *Bacc For the Future* cites statistical data, gathered by the Joint Council for Qualifications, indicating a 34 per cent decline in the number of state pupils taking arts and creative subjects at GCSE since 2010. These figures are supported by the Department for Education’s data on EBacc organisation in schools, indicating that continuation of arts education is managed by: ‘Allocating less curriculum time to non EBacc subjects... offering them through enrichment or after school sessions, not necessarily studied to GCSE’ (DfE

2019:18). Educationalists like Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, called for the scrapping of EBacc, describing it as ‘a straitjacket’ (Smulian, 2019).

Questions for discussion

- What is your view of current educational monitoring and testing procedures?
- What impact do you feel SATS and EBacc requirements have on children and young people’s holistic learning?

Creative revolution: expressive arts for holistic learning

Sir Ken Robinson has repeatedly challenged this standards-driven ethos, calling for a creative revolution, with disciplines equally balanced within the curriculum, to address ‘major areas of intelligence, cultural knowledge and personal development’ (2016: 112). The reduced status of the arts, culture and creativity is contested by extensive evidence supporting its significance. Cultural Learning Alliance’s (CLA) international research data substantiates the role of the arts in combating inequality and supporting school improvement. It argues that ‘the arts and heritage are an intrinsic part of how we come to know and understand the world and how we express ourselves as individuals, communities and a nation’ (2017:2). Distilling its findings into ten key areas, CLA’s research indicates that engagement with the arts empowers participants across holistic indices of health, wellbeing and achievement with benefits including: improvement of cognitive abilities and academic attainment; improved participation through to degree level and beyond with significant positive impact on retention and response amongst children from low income families; enriched levels of societal contributions on social and political levels. The British Council charts the rise of the creative economy, asserting that ‘policies to promote and protect creativity will be the crucial determinants of success in the twenty-first century (Newbigin, undated). Data indicated a rise in value from £94.8 billion in 2016 to £101.5 billion in 2018 with growth in creative and cultural industries ‘at nearly twice the rate of the economy since 2010’ (Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport, 2018).

While success stories support the role of arts, culture and creativity, a commensurate rise in the status of expressive arts subject disciplines within the curriculum has not

occurred. Privileging of cognitive deductive intelligences is arguably endemic within western culture and education, but holistic educationalists like Howard Gardner campaign for a more inclusive paradigm, celebrating shared enterprise, social relationships, spatial skills and physical ingenuity. Gardner's (2011) influential theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) posited intelligence as multi-perspectival, incorporating both traditional spectrums of intelligence such as mathematics and linguistics with: visual and spatial; musical and kinaesthetic; naturalist; interpersonal, intrapersonal; spiritual and existential consciousness. The continued reluctance to create disciplinary parity within international curricula must reflect contemporary societies' underlying ethos, indicative of their dominant ideologies, values and aspirations.

Such meaning systems are disseminated implicitly and explicitly throughout a society's entire cultural milieu (Williams, 1958 cited in Higgins 2001:11) with cultural institutions bestowing value on artists' production, reinforcing stratification of value by their patronage. Yet challenges to cultural hierarchies, colonialism, gender and class emerge from feminism, queer theory, post-colonialism and anti-globalisation, with post-modernism proposing multiple narratives, countering traditional paradigmatic structures. The ability to operate across the spectrum of cultural production, understanding its nuances of meaning and function, is connoted as 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984). While not conveying fiscal wealth, it ascribes 'symbolic profit' (p. 230), social confidence and esteem. As CLA (2017) find, creative and cultural learning can positively impact upon holistic learning, wellbeing, health, and sustainability, empowering a stronger sense of identity, critical thinking and citizenship. This does not occur in a vacuum; as Robinson (2016) claims, creativity is an acculturated, not an individualistic phenomenon, predicated on socio-cultural conditions. It requires acknowledgement of learners' diversity of experiences and perspectives within increasingly heterogeneous global societies and contexts.

Pedagogies of empowerment through expressive arts: a policy and practice heritage

The need for a broad spectrum of learning experiences within a balanced curriculum can be charted in education policy over half a century. This section examines the advocacy of creative and cultural aspects of education encapsulated through expressive arts, highlighting a range of key policy documents within the UK.

Concerns raised over this period are equally relevant in addressing contemporary societal and curricular change.

The Plowden Report (1967) provided a comprehensive review of primary education and secondary transition at a time of educational change. The Labour Government's commitment to egalitarianism instigated replacement of the grammar school system with comprehensive education, superseding streaming with a focus on children's individual needs. Espousing a liberal view of child-centred learning, informed by Piaget's theories of development, Plowden argued for equable, inclusive provision across a spectrum of socio-economic need. Learning through the arts was promoted as a key curriculum component, as a means of expression, and an essential attribute for the developing child and a healthy society, affecting: 'all aspects of our life from the design of the commonplace articles of everyday life to the highest forms of individual expression' (Plowden, 1967: 246).

Following their Education Reform Act of 1988, the Conservative Government established the National Curriculum, to ensure commonality of provision across the state sector. Schools within primary and secondary phases were required to provide a core curriculum of subjects. Art and Design and Music were identified as single-subject areas, while Drama and Dance were part of the English and Physical Education subjects respectively. This curriculum provision has remained, for state-funded schools in the UK, during consecutive governments, while schools within the private and academy sectors regard it as advisory or discretionary (Gov.UK, 2014). Continued concern at the perceived lack of balance in the curriculum instigated two influential educational reports, examining the role of expressive arts in education in 1980s and 1990s, both edited by Sir Ken Robinson.

The Arts in Schools Report (1989) reiterated Plowden's emphasis on the relevance of expressive arts in education, pinpointing societal conditions as key factors in the profile of the arts within education. Robinson suggested that socio-economic challenges should be addressed by an education system not merely addressing immediate employment needs, but also generating 'intuition, creativity, sensibility and practical skills' (p.5), prerequisites for generating new employment opportunities and adaptation to societal change. The Report advocated a curriculum balanced between logical deductive skills and expressive capacities, arguing that cultural and

creative qualities develop flexibility, and understanding of pluralist perspectives and values. Such heterogeneity of thinking enables citizens to respond positively to the benefits and challenges of living within an increasingly culturally diverse world, and to contribute effectively to it. Robinson described our own society and the wider world as a cornucopia of differences to be understood, celebrated and assimilated, an analysis which continued to hold resonance over the following three decades.

Ten years later the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) published their report on arts in education, *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (1999), placing creativity and cultural education as inter-related components fostering skills, knowledge and understanding to respond to societal change. Defining creativity as 'imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value' (NACCCE, 1999:30), the Report presents a democratic perception of creative engagement as attainable across the spectrum of subject disciplines. It construes cultural learning, in its most democratic sense, as taking place across 'shared values and patterns of behaviour that characterise different social groups and communities' (p.47). Emerging from these findings, the *Creative Partnerships* initiative provides opportunities for young people in deprived areas to develop their creativity and experience, working collaboratively with a range of partners and multi-disciplinary agencies: schools, arts practitioners, creative organisations and businesses. Its mission statement promotes the potential of the arts to:

empower young people and the adults in their lives to imagine and question how the world can be improved, giving them the capability to solve individual and collective problems, to create and innovate and to build confidence and a positive attitude towards their future learning and lives (*Creative Partnerships*, 2019).

Though its funding stream was reduced by later Coalition and Conservative Governments, *Creative Partnerships* continues to generate a lasting legacy, inspiring young people to be innovative, risk-taking, adventurous and co-operative members of society, alongside facilitating regenerative connections between educationalists, arts professionals and institutions.

Every Child Matters (ECM) legislation (DfES, 2004) similarly promoted a holistic approach, supporting young people's spiritual, moral, social and cultural needs (SMSC), alongside physical, emotional and intellectual personal development. The five ECM outcomes addressed learners' health, safety, achievement and enjoyment, ability to contribute to society, and economic wellbeing. ECM recognised the socio-cultural factors placing additional pressure on schools in meeting both academic and holistic outcomes, with schools in deprived environments struggling to meet students' social needs alongside academic targets and league tables. Arts subjects contribute to wider creative and cultural learning, while potentially developing economic growth, alongside providing empowering leisure activities for young people. Reduction of their status is regarded by arts educationalists as detrimental to the employment and social needs of its future citizens, particularly those vulnerable to unemployment and cultural exclusion. CLA (2017) continues to campaign for the significance of expressive arts, demonstrating that: 'Learning through and about culture is a human right enshrined in international law' with 'compelling educational, employment and civic benefits delivered by cultural learning' (p.2).

Such evidence informed the independent review *Cultural Education in England* (Henley, 2012), commissioned by the 2010 Coalition Government. Henley, argued for universal access to cultural and creative educational opportunities across statutory education 'ensuring that all children and young people in England, no matter what their background, circumstances or location, receive the highest quality Cultural Education both in school and out of school, in formal and in informal settings' (p.4). Henley challenged EBacc's curriculum balance, advocating mandatory inclusion of one expressive arts subject to be studied to GCSE level. Sorrell, Roberts and Henley (2014) then published a manifesto, arguing for the holistic impact of the arts in four key areas: knowledge, critical and analytical skills, designing and making skills, and understanding the historical breadth of human experience. They contend that the arts develop young people's 'sense of their own identity and a shared understanding and appreciation of the environment in which they live and their own personal role within that environment' (2014: 28). Such holistic pedagogy regards education as a means of empowering young people as engaged citizens, not merely a process of cognitive training.

Questions for discussion

- How do policies, literature, and research data provide evidence for developing the role of expressive arts within curricula?
- What impact does engagement in holistic learning through the arts have on individuals and society?

International case study: fostering empowerment and holistic learning through expressive arts

A foremost issue of our time, for global citizens and educationalists committed to promoting equal access to education, is the increasing challenge to provide for the influx of young migrants seeking refuge in the UK and Europe from civil unrest, war and economic destitution. Approximately 10 per cent of the EU population were born in a different country from their place of residence; children under the age of 15 constitute 5 per cent of this group (Jante, Harte, 2016). Although the pattern varies by country, data indicate that children with a migrant background tend towards lower educational achievement and are more likely to leave school early than their counterparts from a native background, particularly when refugee status is combined with economic deprivation (Population Europe, 2014). Social integration is recognised, within international policy agendas, as crucial for cohesion and economic growth, yet lack of training and resources may hamper educators in responding effectively to increased academic, linguistic, and social diversity within their classrooms.

As humans we build our sense of self, and relationships with others, through social, cultural and political environments. Our identity is constructed through interaction with familial, social and cultural networks, informed by community, nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, generation, class, sexual orientation, abilities and needs. Article 27 of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) declared that 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits'. Integration through arts education is a tested practice that has yielded positive results in improving the performance of disadvantaged children and their families, enriching

cultural and social interconnections. The European Commission (2017) identified key foci for effective integration of migrant communities as:

- Empowerment: recognising migrants and refugees as individuals with knowledge, skills and cultural experience;
- Intersectional connections: engaging educational, economic, cultural, and welfare partnerships in programmes integrating migrant and local communities.

Empirical responses to the European Commission's Report include their funding of international arts educational initiatives like the international project *ArtsTogether: Integrating Migrant Children through the Arts* (2019). *ArtsTogether's* partnership team draws from academic, educational, charitable, cultural and social welfare sectors of five European countries: Austria, Belgium, Greece, Italy and the UK. Building on good practice from research data and exemplars, it develops and tests a curriculum based on expressive arts activities. Collaborative approaches equip teachers in responding to socio-cultural and linguistic diversity, fostering mutual understanding and respect among their students and the school community, while improving the educational performance of migrant students. Supporting these aims is the *ArtsTogether Inclusion Curricula* (2019), developed by the current author and UK partnership team at Bath Spa University. Providing an empirical focus for disseminating and celebrating shared creative, cultural and social experiences, it fosters understanding and respect for our shared humanity through the theme 'Our Stories, Our Communities'.

ArtsTogether promotes an inclusive pedagogy, supporting integration of migrant children and their families through creative, intercultural engagement across the wider family and school community. Interdisciplinary active learning experiences foster holistic collaborative pedagogy and practice, enriching cognitive and affective development. Curriculum resources explore and celebrate the theme 'Our Stories, Our Communities' across a wide range of cultural contexts. Learning activities encourage children and young people from migrant and host communities, to reflect on their own and others' cultural experiences and contexts, sharing and celebrating both common and contrasting experiences. *ArtsTogether* resources, and Learning Activities stimulate curiosity and empathy in relation to diverse

and shared cultural backgrounds, with intercultural understanding enhanced through universal themes such as: the migratory journeys of all species; global stories exploring personal, social and cultural identity; the environments we inhabit; the seasonal celebrations and festivals which illuminate and enrich our annual calendars. Interdisciplinary learning takes place within five interconnected *ArtsTogether Modules*, each supported by an explanatory Guide, PowerPoints and resources (2019):

1. Journeys
2. Global Stories
3. Performing People
4. Our Shared Environment
5. Celebration

ArtsTogether enriches children's experiences, supporting safe sharing, and promoting development of resilient and creative identities to sustain them within different cultural environments. *ArtsTogether Inclusion Curricula* features a repertoire of creative and artistic resources and collaborative activities that highlight an inclusive approach to cultural identity, diversity and difference, fostering mutual understanding and respect to support individuals' wellbeing, social development and integration. Initial pilot studies of *ArtsTogether* materials within migrant camps, centres, nurseries and schools in Greece and Italy, indicate that *ArtsTogether Inclusion Curricula* provides a global model of affective and holistic learning for transitional learning contexts. This positive approach is based on valuing and supporting individual learning within a changing community context, helping migrant and host communities to develop resilience and work together towards an integrated society.

Conclusion

Partnership is a unifying factor within the policies and projects discussed here, and is widely regarded as a valuable attribute in challenging limitations and prejudice, restricting learners' potential. Henley (2012) regards partnership as central to creative

and cultural education, with contributions from ‘government departments, non-departmental government bodies, the National Lottery, local authorities, schools, cultural organisations, voluntary organisations, the creative and cultural industries, conservation practitioners, business sponsors, charities and philanthropists’ (p. 8). Evidence indicates that partnership-based arts projects can build self-esteem and promote human rights, extending understanding and appreciation of diversity.

While current educational paradigms are predicated on notions of western society as post-industrial and systems-based, evidence suggests that global societies are in flux, struggling to respond to political, economic, environmental and socio-cultural challenges. Literature and data signal the issues impacting upon education, and policies and strategies must address the widening challenge of global educational agendas. Shifts towards creative- and knowledge-based societies demand new educational legislation and approaches; governments are being challenged to recognise the potential of expressive arts pedagogies in evolving educational policy. Expressive arts practitioners and theorists passionately believe the arts are transformational tools, engaging learners in creative and cultural activities facilitating extrinsic and intrinsic benefits to themselves and their communities. Educators need such strategies and opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and expertise to empower children and young people in their care with the creative, holistic capacities to embrace and address future societal change.

Questions for discussion

- How can expressive arts pedagogies contribute to learners’ sense of empowerment and to societal integration?
- How can cultural and educational institutions foster expressive arts education locally, nationally and internationally?

Summary

- Arts educationalists challenge narrow subject hierarchies and over-emphasis on testing, advocating pluralist educational perspectives to foster holistic learning.
- Current and past policy and approaches explicate the need for expressive arts to be recognized as pivotal in learners’ and societal development.

- Cultural and creative partnerships promote key knowledge and skills, empowering learners to contribute to twenty first century life.
- Expressive arts education provides strategies to address holistic national and international educational agendas.

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