

Cultural Education Progression - Learning Exchange: Schools

Notes from Table Discussions

The Learning Exchange was structured around a series of presentations and facilitated table discussion. Key themes, learning and questions that arose from these discussions are summarised below.

1 The London Landscape

Is there a crisis in cultural education?

- There was considerable interest in the statistics presented by Steve Moffitt¹. The mismatch between the highest current and predicted concentration of school-aged young people (predominantly outer London) and the location of NPOs (predominantly inner London), for example, struck a chord with many participants.
- Whilst there is a need for NPOs (and other cultural organisations) to expand their geographical reach, there are great benefits for schools and cultural organisations in building local partnerships (proximity to a venue, for example, eliminating the need for transportation). Funding can also be tied to local activity. The question therefore arises as to how to maximise these local assets? Local partner schools can advocate for an organisation's work across a teaching school alliance, for example or within a local authority Headteachers' forum.
- Alongside the topics raised by Steve, participants discussed other issues that are impacting negatively on cultural education. These include falling take-up of arts subjects at KS4 and KS5 (following EBacc), further curriculum change and Ofsted.
- Funders are becoming more responsive to supporting cultural learning programmes. However, there is still a tendency for funding to be awarded to a cultural organisation who then seeks schools to engage with this pre-determined project (schools as consumers rather than partners). ***Funders should be encouraged to support projects that have been co-designed by schools and cultural partners.***
- There is still a need to articulate the value of cultural learning within the sector.

¹ [Is there a crisis in Cultural Education in London schools](#)

Action for AND: We need help to lobby CEOs to understand and support our work.

What are the opportunities to expand your schools market?

- There is a tendency for cultural organisations to work with 'the usual suspects' (we all know who these schools are!). These schools will always say 'yes' (reducing our need for research and marketing) and will guarantee a positive working relationship (ensuring successful outcomes to report to funders). We need to move beyond these schools and may need support to broker new school partnerships. ***Music Education Hubs and Local Authorities have links with all their local schools and valuable knowledge on school priorities and interests.***
- ***Should cultural organisations share their school contacts?*** There is sometimes a perception that cultural organisations are working in competition but with over 3,000 school in London, can this really be the case? There are benefits to collaborative working. In Greenwich, for example, a group of arts organisations have joined forces to map their work against the new curriculum and to share information about which schools they plan to work with. ***As a sector, we need to improve how we collect and share data.***
- We need, individually and as a sector, to ***advocate more effectively for the value of our work.*** This is particularly important if we want to work with risk-averse schools and/or need to charge for our work with schools. ***What will schools get for their money?*** For risk-averse schools, we also need to explore long-term and nurturing relationships.
- Some of the 'major' cultural organisations in London have sufficient funding to employ a learning team and offer free activities. What role (or even, responsibility) do these organisations have in fostering links with disengaged schools?
- Cultural activities often increase parental engagement with schools (see Creative Partnerships research²). How can we use this to extend parental support for culture including support for their children to study arts subjects?

² <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=their-learning-becomes-your-journey-dec-2007&site=45>

- Research³ shows that young people from particular sectors of the community are less likely to opt for arts subjects at GCSE and are more likely to attend schools that have a limited arts-offer. ***Can we advocate to parents so that they use their influence with schools and young people?***
- Some cultural organisations are particularly successful at working with disengaged communities. How can the sector learn from their experience and how can these organisations act as a gateway to further cultural engagement?
- New schools are opening in London to meet increasing demand. This is an opportunity. Make contact with senior leaders at new schools in your locality as they open.

Action for AND: We need up-to-date lists of relevant contacts on Music Education Hubs and local authorities

2. How can schools & cultural organisations work better with each other? ⁴

It is essential for cultural organisations to understand the educational climate that schools are operating in and the specific needs of individual schools

How can we address the barrier identified by schools: lack of information? (86% - see this as barrier, 34% - see this as a strong barrier).

- Do schools suffer from a lack of information or do they suffer from information overload? Anecdotal evidence from participants supports the latter, with schools bombarded with information but still asking 'Yes, but is it any good?'
- As a sector, ***we need to present a more coherent and strategic message to schools on the value of cultural learning and the value of working in partnership with cultural organisations.***
- We need to utilise existing networks such as teaching school alliances, academy chains and Headteachers' fora. Participants noted that delegates at Assistant and Deputy Heads' Conferences were often more receptive to cultural learning than Heads.

³ See, for example, Cultural Learning Alliance EBacc research, <http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence.aspx>

⁴ [link to prezi](#)

- Individually, ***we need to state more clearly how our work will support specific aspects of the curriculum*** (including transferable skills such as team working and communication) or help schools deliver other priorities such as increasing parental engagement.

How do you assess whether your offer is fit for purpose?

- We pilot our work, evaluate, amend, roll-out and re-evaluate.
- ***Evaluation needs to be embedded and seek the views of all stakeholders*** to make a judgement about the value of a project. Success cannot be determined by one partner.
- Do teachers feel able to give honest feedback? (We tend to pilot with partner schools who don't want to upset us). We can use external evaluators. We can use an online survey that provides anonymity.
- ***Do teachers and cultural organisations share common understandings about quality?*** This needs to be part of the conversation with schools during planning, delivery and evaluation of projects. ***How can the ACE Quality Principles support these conversations?***
- School-to-school recommendations tend to operate as quality assurance. The new e-portal in Islington, for example, allows arts organisations to include quotes from teachers in their profile.
- There is a danger of assigning a gold standard to bespoke projects: many schools prefer an off-the-shelf activity as they know what they are buying and teachers may not have the time or confidence to co-design a project. ***We need to offer flexibility through a combination of bespoke and off-the-shelf.*** One approach is to co-design a bespoke project and, if successful, offer this more widely as an off-the-shelf project.

Action for AND: We need help to define and evidence quality, value and impact.

3. Different types of schools – School Segmentation Model⁵

Do you recognise this typology of schools?

- There was universal recognition of the four segments of schools and participants found the model a useful way of thinking about who they work with. (Participants did question if the responses to the survey, and hence the segment assigned, reflected a whole-school approach or an individual teacher).

If you are going to expand the range of schools you work with, which segment will you target?

- **We need to think about the relationship between the four areas and the movement of schools between the segments.** How can we encourage *Intrigued Engagers* to increase their levels of engagement, for example or *Cultural Eclectics*, to take a more strategic approach to engagement? A presentation from Stratford Circus described how their Partnership Programme is addressing these questions through a process of auditing and strategic planning with schools.
- **Are Cultural Commissioners getting too much?** There was widespread recognition that virtually all participants are working with *Cultural Commissioners* (this nomenclature, usefully replaced 'the usual suspects' discussed earlier in the day) and that this may be to the detriment of other segments. Response varied and included:
 - Just say No! (to Cultural Commissioners)
 - Adopt a differentiated charging policy and ask a higher fee from Cultural Commissioners.
 - Encourage Cultural Commissioners to act as ambassadors for the sector/an organisation.
 - Develop model projects with Cultural Commissioners which the school then promotes across a cluster.
- The majority of participants work to a greater or lesser extent with three of the four segments. Many felt they do not have the capacity (time, personnel, funding) to engage schools with *Other Priorities*. **If we believe in entitlement however, can we afford to ignore the young people in these schools?** Perhaps we all need to take small steps to address this situation as the following example illustrates:
- Following an audit of its schools work, Sadler's Wells approached three local schools with low levels of cultural engagement, to explore potential partnership work.

⁵ [Different types of schools – The Segmentation model](#)

Conversations centre on the respective school's needs and Sadler's Wells recognises that the relationship will take time to evolve. One primary school, for example, is currently sending a Y5 class to work with Box Office staff at the venue to address a priority on numeracy.

Action for AND: Could AND share other best practice models of engaging schools with Other Priorities?