



CULTURAL CAPITAL

IN OUR NEW STUDY - CULTURAL CAPITAL, A NEW DIRECTION ASKED PUPILS IN LONDON AGED BETWEEN 13 AND 19 ABOUT THEIR HABITS OF CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

SARAH DAVIES, A NEW DIRECTION

The focus of the research was differences in levels of engagement, and attitudes to engagement, between poorer students (defined as those in receipt of Free School Meals and/or living in a household with no working adults) and their peers.

The aim was to help understand the implicit and explicit barriers to engagement presented by wealth inequality.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

Across the board, levels of engagement in culture are high but this masks some categories of very low engagement – particularly for boys. For instance, 20% of boys engage in dance compared to 37% of girls, and 30% with music compared to 46% of girls.

Young people from poorer backgrounds are less likely to take part in every category of cultural activity but this is particularly marked in certain areas including visiting exhibitions (62% vs. 70%), music activities (61% vs. 69%) and heritage visits (61% vs. 71%).

MOTIVATIONS

Young people tend to find their own strategies for engagement rather than through school or organised activity – e.g. more than half of young people who engaged in music activities in their free time did so outside of structured classes or courses. Strong factors that would encourage all young people to engage more with arts and culture include being able to take part with friends (69%), having the right equipment (60%), having activity linked to study or helping with study (66%).

The places that young people are most likely to spend time outside of home and school include cinemas, shopping centres and parks. This reflects the fact that these places feel welcoming and are in familiar areas.

ORGANISED, REGULAR ACTIVITIES

More than two in five (42%) young people are members of a club (defined as a place to undertake regular leisure activity outside of school). Their engagement is very frequent, with 83% going at

least once a week and 37% 2 or 3 times a week. This is a very significant site for learning and personal development.

Young people from poorer backgrounds are much less likely to be members of a club – 35% vs. 47%. They are missing out on the learning and socialising of these places and it suggests they are more tied to home and places they can hang around.

Young people from poorer backgrounds have less pocket money and the money they have they spend slightly differently – more on mobile phone credit than their peers (26% vs. 15%) who spend it on clothes, music tickets and music, snacks and cinema tickets. Young people from less well-off families feel less able than their peers to ask their parents for money (67% vs. 74%).

CONCLUSIONS

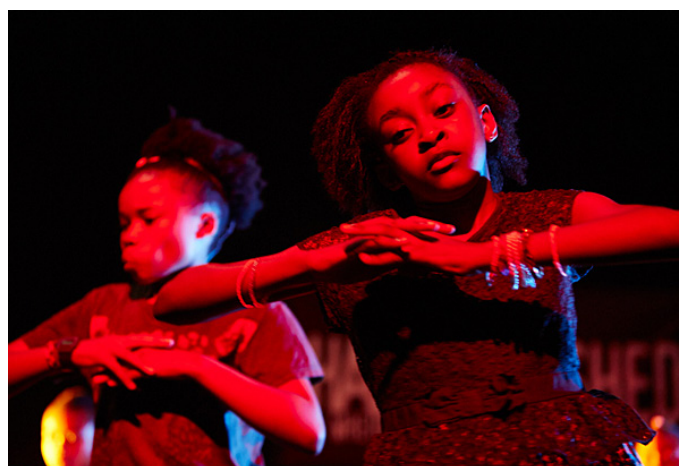
It is hardly surprising that young people from more economically disadvantaged backgrounds engage in culture less than their peers, though it is important to remember that schools continue to play a key role in sustaining a consistent level of cultural engagement for all young people.

Wider research suggests that not taking part in extra-curricular/ leisure type activities as a child can have a profound impact on life chances and is likely to play a part in poorer children doing less well at school. Recent attention has focussed on the role of wider activities in building qualities such as resilience, discipline and character.

AND's Cultural Capital research identifies 5 main barriers to engagement which comprise social and practical obstacles as well as psychological ones. This supports other research (Muschamp et al) which suggests that psychological barriers are just as important as practical ones. It is possible that young people become fixed in a mindset of participation at an early age and this is hard to change once it has become established. According to Muschamp et al, poorer children are more likely than their peers to identify as a 'non-attender' which contributes to a sense of exclusion.

It is critical to understand these complex factors when building strategies for engaging those children and young people who are not currently engaging and to make sure that existing cultural offers and opportunities do not simply benefit 'keen' students and those who are better-off. Problematic issues of the ethics of compulsory vs.

voluntary engagement are raised however, as well as debates around 'whose culture?' and whether or not adults are sufficiently respectful of young people's cultural choices (if indeed they should be). The pertinent issues of lack of cultural awareness and vocabulary in young people and a lack of consistent definition of arts and culture are also discussed. These concerns are explored in greater depth in the paper 'Young London's Cultural Capital' by Sarah B Davies, commissioned by AND to place the Cultural Capital study in the context of wider research.



A New Direction is launching an investigation into some of these questions in order to better understand;

- What is going on in terms of engagement? Do we know which children and young people are not engaging in arts and culture and why?
- Why does it matter? What is the impact of zero or limited engagement and is it significant?
- What could be done to change the picture and whose responsibility is this?

WE ARE INVITING COMMENTS FROM PARENTS, YOUNG PEOPLE, CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS, ACADEMICS, THOSE WORKING IN EDUCATION ETC. WHICH HELP CONTRIBUTE IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH, FOR CAMPAIGNS AND ACTION THAT CAN HELP BUILD MORE EQUAL ACCESS TO THE ARTS AND CULTURE FOR ALL CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE IN LONDON.

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