

## Quality in Arts Education

In her keynote speech, Professor Maggie Atkinson stressed the importance of moving beyond a 'tick box' approach to cultural education to one where we think about how we deliver arts and cultural learning in schools. Debating the conditions for, and characteristics of, high quality provision are central to such thinking.

In the workshop on Quality in Arts Education, we focused on Arts Council England's Quality Principles which have been developed over the last four years through a process of research, consultation and piloting with cultural sector organisations and young people. The Quality Principles are also embedded in the new Artsmark award and were found to be useful by the 100 schools that piloted Artsmark in summer 2015.

### Quality Principles

1. Striving for excellence and innovation
2. Being authentic
3. Being exciting, inspiring and engaging
4. Ensuring a positive and inclusive experience
5. Actively involving children and young people
6. Enabling personal progression
7. Developing belonging and ownership

Teachers in the workshop began by exploring what each Quality Principle looks like in their own practice. This group activity prompted interesting discussions including:

- *What do we mean by 'authentic' arts education?*
- *How far can we stretch the confines of the curriculum and assessment to actively involve young people in the design and direction of projects, giving them ownership of cultural production?*
- *It is relatively easy to be exciting but what remains after the 'warm glow'? How do we also inspire and support young people to take action as a result?*

Having explored how we, as educators, understand the Principles, we went on to think how we could share them with children and young people of different ages. Working in Key Stage groups, teachers went on to translate the Principles into a set of promises for pupils about cultural learning. At KS1, for example, QP2 became *'Together, we can explore the world around us'* and QP5 became *'We will listen to your ideas and use as many as we can'*; at KS2, QP4 became *'I promise to get to know you'* and QP6 became *'We want you to be the best you can be'*; and at KS3/4, QP1 became *'We will research best practice to support your learning and explore new ideas together.'*

Teachers also considered how the Quality Principles could support their work with cultural partners. What might they look for in a project proposal, outside visit or classroom workshop to tell them if this was a high quality activity? Responses included:

- QP 1 - the project needs to move practice forward at school (for teachers and pupils).
- QP2 & 6 - the project/visit needs to include opportunities for pupils to learn about how artists work and potential careers in the creative industries.
- QP4 - workshop proposals need a 'Plan B' and preferably a 'Plan C' too!

In general, we found it useful to think of the list as 'characteristics of quality' that we could plan for and identify in our work. We would not expect all the Principles to be evident in every lesson or project but they can act as useful prompts for planning and reflection, and mirror good pedagogic practice.