

When asked to read a report entitled 'The Arts in Schools', published in 1982, I thought it would be laughable and an outdated piece of writing with ill-informed views surrounding the value of the arts. I was almost looking forward to reading how old-fashioned it was so that in 2022, in all the social and economic turmoil, I could perhaps find some relief in 'well at least we don't think like that anymore'.

What I didn't expect were pages of the most pressing and current debates surrounding the arts in schools; questions of class, inequality, in-school teacher pressures and the effects of British colonialism. I thought this project was going to be about updating the old, not spotlighting it as a matter of urgency in today's society.

The more we, a group of young people of different ages, privileges and experiences, read through the report, the more it resonated with our memories of school. The arts as a means for competition, the lack of resources and teacher capacity, the lack of respect that the arts got in school and especially from other faculty members, the constraints of the national curriculum and the pressures on teachers to 'do more for less'.

One of the lines in the report says, "The most important resource of any school is its teachers". A sentence that was true in 1982 and true today, but now reads like a slap in the face. How can teachers possibly be "the most important resource" when they're treated so badly and when there's such inequality and inequitable distribution of funds and salary?

This line, under the current climate, no longer reads as undeniable truth but as a lead-in to an argument about teacher conditions which inevitably affects the lives and education of children and young people. This line inspired the below.

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"The most important resource of any school is its teachers"

"The most important resource of any school is its teachers" ... who today are at physical and mental breaking point due to no pay rises, crippling workloads and impossible pressures to be subject-specialist in 4 different classes.

"The most important resource of any school is its teachers" ... but when education is geared towards the needs of the labour market, commodifying the next generation of workers in light of horrifying austerity, how are arts teachers supposed to inspire in their children and young people one of art's core elements – freedom from fear?

"The most important resource of any school is its teachers" ... but British colonialism has westernised the art that it stole and arts teachers do not have the freedom within their own classroom to dialogue with their pupils about the history and effects of this country's imperialist past. They are however at liberty to be experts on Bollywood dancing if the national curriculum sees fit.

"The most important resource of any school is its teachers"... but they're forced to legitimise their teaching by quantifying their pupils' learning through mark schemes dictating 'acceptable artistic expression'.

"The most important resource of any school is its teachers" ... but they're left to scramble for scraps of funding to buy discounted arts supplies when they're not using their own money.

"The most important resource of any school is its teachers" ... but they too are a victim of their own teaching. A lack of emphasis in teacher training around the cross-curricular value of an artistic set of skills fosters a lack of respect from other core subjects, making it impossible for faculty to unite.

"The most important resource of any school is its teachers" ... but there is gross inequality in funding and opportunity for arts. Private school pupils have a wealth of experience as opposed to marginalised, under-privileged schools where the teachers are fighting to meet minimum curriculum requirements on donated resource. These schools and teachers do not need humanitarian charity. They need solidarity, starting with the faculty in-school and those in privately funded schools.

"The most important resource of any school is its teachers"... and teachers must see change. A change towards equitable division of all funding made available to schools. A change that sees higher pay and better working conditions. A change that introduces extensive teacher training, to arts teachers and especially core subjects specialists, that demonstrates the immeasurable benefits of applying artistic skills to cross-curricular teaching. A change that allows total freedom in the classroom to dialogue on the honest history of the arts in Britain, fostering true understanding and respect for the many cultures that make up British society. A change that allows teachers to learn and grow in themselves every day, where their focus is the development of themselves and their pupils, not the next Ofsted inspection.

"The most important resource of any school is its teachers" ... but they are fucking fired and they cannot do it alone. They need and deserve the support of the schools and people in their communities and beyond to fight alongside them.

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