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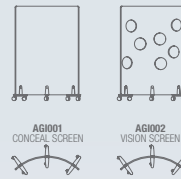
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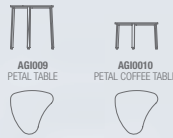
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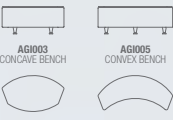


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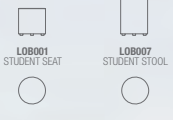
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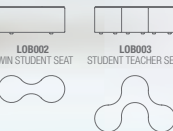
AG1006 PETAL SEAT
AG1007 PETAL STOOL



AG1003 CONCAVE BENCH
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PLANNING LEARNING SPACES

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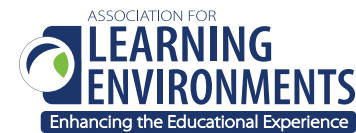


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THE VITAL ROLE OF THE ARTS

IRENA BARKER
EDITORIAL ADVISOR



The continued threat of Covid-19 meant that the school Christmas show season last year [2021] will have been a triumph for some and a washout for others.

While some students took to the stage for fabulous performances of *A Christmas Carol* with parents in attendance, others had their events cancelled, or didn't even prepare one at all.

It is easy to think that this Covid-induced "performing arts postcode lottery" will soon be corrected and schools will go back to their embrace of music-making, performance, art and design.

Sadly, though, in recent years, we have seen the arts in schools continually undermined by Government policies and funding cuts – and Covid-19 has only expedited the crisis.

This is why *Planning Learning Spaces* magazine has chosen to explore the vital role of the arts in schools in this edition.

Suzanne Kyle sets out the situation in stark detail on page 22, as she reveals that A-level music entries have declined by 50 per cent in the last decade, and research indicates it will disappear entirely from state schools by 2033 if this decline continues. Other features explore why the arts in schools are so much more important than the "frills" that some might believe them to be.

Former Royal Ballet soloist Eric Underwood speaks to me on page 17, outlining how his

own dance career came about through sheer serendipity, and how he is now focused on highlighting careers in dance to children who may not have been exposed to it.

On a visit to a London primary school, he tells how even those who do not take up careers in ballet learn skills and develop confidence that can be expressed in so many other areas of life and work.

This idea is explored further in an article by Prakash Nair and Louis Serota from Education Design International. They explain the importance of arts-based learning that is "well integrated into every part of the curriculum and fully enmeshed in the built environment".

The benefits of such learning, they stress, include lower student drop out, higher attendance, better collaborative skills, and many others.

These are all ideas that most reading this magazine will surely be on board with. But do the big decision-makers – many of whom are fond of the ballet and the opera themselves – understand just how important the arts in schools really are?

Irena Barker.

BATH SCHOOLS OF ART AND DESIGN WINS NATIONAL RIBA AWARD 2021

Originally a factory for Herman Miller, repurposed by Farrell/Grimshaw in 1976, Grade II listed in 2013 and now successfully reimagined by Grimshaw for 2021, this striking single-story "shed" houses Bath Spa University's Schools of Art and Design. The original brief was for "a building that would adapt to changing needs of current and future occupiers, encouraging an open community for people within and those around it". RIBA judges called the resulting building

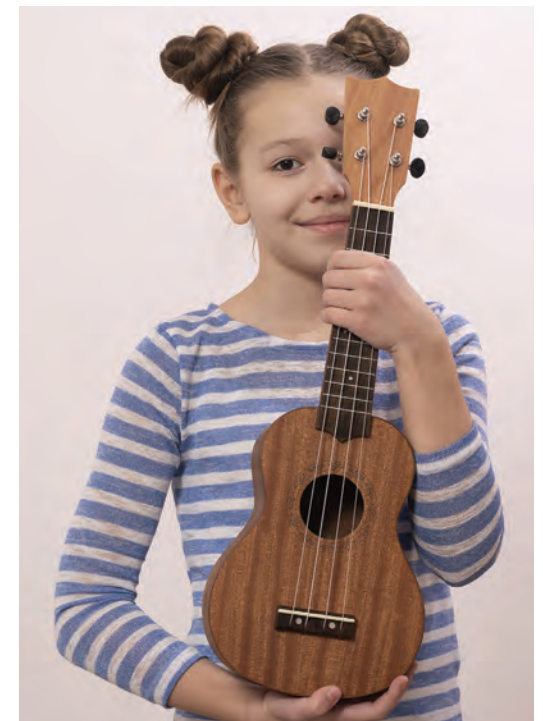
"beautiful", praising its dramatic improvement in energy performance and the environments designed for "creativity, quiet contemplation and to engage with others".

Dan Allen, Head of School of Art, Bath Spa University, said: "In the past we had to adapt our practices to suit the building, but now we have a building that doesn't dictate, but informs how we teach differently. It's very exciting for the academics."



UKULELE OVERTAKES RECORDER IN SCHOOLS

In news that may be welcomed by the ears of teachers and parents, the ukulele appears to be replacing the recorder as the starter instrument of choice in schools. Research by music exam board, ABRSM, has revealed a 47% decrease in those playing the recorder between 2014 and 2020, whereas use of the ukulele for whole-class ensemble music lessons has risen from 1% in 2014 to 15% today. As well as being easier on the ear, the ukulele is seen as easier to master at a basic level, which encourages young musicians to continue. It's also more fashionable, with bands such as Mumford and Sons and artists like Billie Eilish raising the profile of the instrument, as well as being cheap, more hygienic to share and the perfect size for children's hands.



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LEARNING IN FOCUS AT WORLD EXPO, DUBAI

Education took centre stage at the UK Pavilion at World Expo, Dubai, at the end of last year. A three-day summit entitled "In the future... how will we learn?" featured talks and panel sessions across a wide range of educational issues. Helen Grant, the UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Girls' Education (pictured at lectern), chaired a session on 'Why global girls' education matters'.

Round-the-world yachtswoman Tracy Edwards MBE spoke movingly about why she has become an activist in the area, explaining that "ensuring girls in the developing world have access to a quality education is an investment not just in them, but in their communities

and their future families". Tracy went on to urge: "Following Covid-19, this is more important than ever as girls forced from their school rooms by the pandemic are at risk of never returning. Without sustained investments in girls' education, we will not reverse the impact of Covid-19 on the world's poorest countries."

Other sessions included "Learning without walls" which debated whether or not the classroom was dead. With individualised learning already a reality in some classrooms the session discussed how new approaches and styles to teaching needed to be developed.

World Expo runs in Dubai until the end of March 2022.

CREATIVE WRITING

Established in 2013, "That's Your Story", funded by the Arts Council, runs workshops with primary school children across the UK during which they create brand-new, exciting stories that are turned into books, comics and podcasts, which are then given back to the participants. Ian Billings, author and comedian, leads these creative writing workshops and says: "Once everyone realises it's a forum for fun, the ideas start coming in tidal waves. There is a moment in every session when the communal penny drops and they realise 'this is free, this is funny and this is ours.' It's a joyous process."

Billy Plonka and the Grot Laboratory by Ian Billings is out now.



WELCOME TO OUR ARTS SPECIAL

In this issue we explore the role of creativity in schools, why it matters and how children and young people benefit from participating in art, music, dance, drama and making things. We spoke to people who have enjoyed successful careers in the arts and they all talk about the power of creative subjects to inspire children who have disengaged from the narrow confines of academic study. The arts also offer alternative routes into the study of “core” subjects, like the school in Plymouth where drawing and painting were seen as an equally valid way of exploring a subject as writing about it.

One thing “creative people” have in common is that they are fans of mistakes, seeing them as a gateway to learning, often leading to deeper understanding, the discovery of something completely new or a realisation that you would never have had if things had gone as expected. Many a successful invention has come about because plan A went “wrong”. A school system that educates people only to get things right and to avoid ever making mistakes is perhaps the biggest mistake of all.

As Dr Millan Sachania, headmaster of Streatham and Clapham High School in London, wrote in a recent letter to *The Times*: “Learning about calculus and covalent bonding is important. Yet our youngsters cannot emerge from the pandemic in good spirits without engaging with music, literature and the creative and performing arts. As such, these subjects are the fount of mental health and the fruitful appreciation of the human condition.”

**“WE STIGMATISE MISTAKES.
AND WE’RE NOW RUNNING
NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL
SYSTEMS WHERE MISTAKES
ARE THE WORST THING
YOU CAN MAKE – AND
THE RESULT IS THAT WE
ARE EDUCATING PEOPLE
OUT OF THEIR CREATIVE
CAPACITIES.”**

KEN ROBINSON

“PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS, PARTICULARLY PERFORMING, CREATES MOMENTS YOU REMEMBER THAT SUSTAIN YOU THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE. IT MATTERS.”

VIEW FROM THE TOP

James Clarke asks three people who have enjoyed successful careers in the arts, all of whom are from Watlington, to reflect on the importance of the arts in education.

Watlington, on the borders of Oxfordshire in England, may be a familiar sight to viewers of British TV because its charmingly crooked streets and proximity to London mean it's often used for filming. Perhaps less well known is that Watlington is also home to an extraordinary number of people who have carved out successful careers in the arts. From Oscar-winning actors and film company executives, to publishers, musicians and artists from all across the creative spectrum, this small town (it claims to be England's smallest and certainly feels more like a village) in the Chiltern Hills punches above its weight in terms of its artistic credentials. It also happens to be the home town of *Learniture*. Where better for this magazine's arts issue to find out the view from the top: what do successful people think about the arts in schools and how important was education to their career?

“...EVERY YOUNG PERSON CAN GET SOMETHING OF VALUE FROM THE ARTS.”

DAVID MARCOU VIOLINIST

One of my earliest musical memories is being absolutely blown away by the music of the Queen's Coronation. We watched it on a small black-and-white television. I still get shivers when I hear 'Zadok the Priest'!

I did not come from a musical family but I was extremely fortunate to attend a grammar school with a large stock of instruments that pupils could borrow at virtually no cost. After a year of fruitless struggle learning the clarinet, an instrument for which I had no aptitude, I took up the violin instead. By the time I reached my O-level year I was obsessed with becoming a musician.

Probably the most significant thing in my life, growing up, was the support from my family. My family had no background in music at all but they supported me completely. I went to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and within a couple of months of leaving I joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO) and played with them for nearly 30 years, eventually becoming the orchestra's chairman.

While playing with the LPO I started their community outreach programme; we were the first orchestra in the UK to do it. Orchestral music and opera is remote from about 95 per cent of the population and I wanted to bridge the gap between the players and the audience, and give opportunities to young people to share in the excitement of live music. It also enabled the orchestra's players to develop parallel skills.

I think part of the problem with the arts world is that it tries to justify its existence by putting a monetary value on itself, saying it's "worth X billion pounds a year". But the arts are a fundamental part of the human condition, part of our make-up. Imagine a world without music! What would we do at parties, weddings, funerals, ceremonies? It's vital to the human experience.

I am a governor at Icknield Community College, where the arts are part of an inclusive curriculum. Teachers don't have to battle to get space for their subject because the leadership team bangs the drum very effectively for music, dance, art and drama. In other schools there's this idea that creative subjects are not core to children's development – but every young person can get something of value from the arts; something that enhances their life and makes it more fulfilling. I am also Chair of the OYAP Trust, which provides opportunities for disadvantaged young people to participate in the arts, and I see the impact this can have on building self-esteem, confidence and resilience. Children are bursting with creativity but it gets stifled by our rigid education system. If schools could include participation in the arts in a broader and more inclusive framework of achievements and assessments, it could make all the difference for children who struggle at school, helping them to access work or further education by formally recognising their participation in creative activities.

We need to remove this sense that the arts are not important and replace it with the knowledge that they raise standards of living and of happiness. Participation in the arts, particularly performing, creates moments you remember that sustain you throughout your life. It matters.





“IT’S INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT TO TIE EDUCATION TO INDUSTRY. SCHOOLS SHOULD CREATE THE SKILLS NEEDED.”

ANGELA SWAN WEAVER

At school, I wasn't an intellectual, wasn't good at maths, but I had an art teacher who spotted my potential and encouraged me. I do think it often comes down to one very good teacher and mine encouraged me to go to art school. Both my parents were doctors and they wanted me to be a nurse, a much more “suitable” profession, but they decided to let me “get it out of my system”. I left school at 17, studied art at Worthing College, then went on to Camberwell College of Arts. I was given a grant to study, which made an enormous difference. In those days anyone could get funding, so there was a really good spread of people from different backgrounds. Alongside my commercial career designing fabrics and textiles, I taught in universities and colleges for over 25 years, only stepping aside because I thought, at 60, that I should make way for the younger generation.

The arts are very often something that can help children who struggle in mainstream education. I volunteered with a charity where I spent time with children who were at risk of offending. They were almost programmed to fail; they believed they couldn't do anything. They found it so difficult to behave that they were almost impossible to teach in a standard classroom environment, but if you could get them to produce a piece of art that they were proud of, it enabled them to move forward. We got some amazing results from these children, really fantastic drawings. To have done something that they really succeeded at made a huge difference.

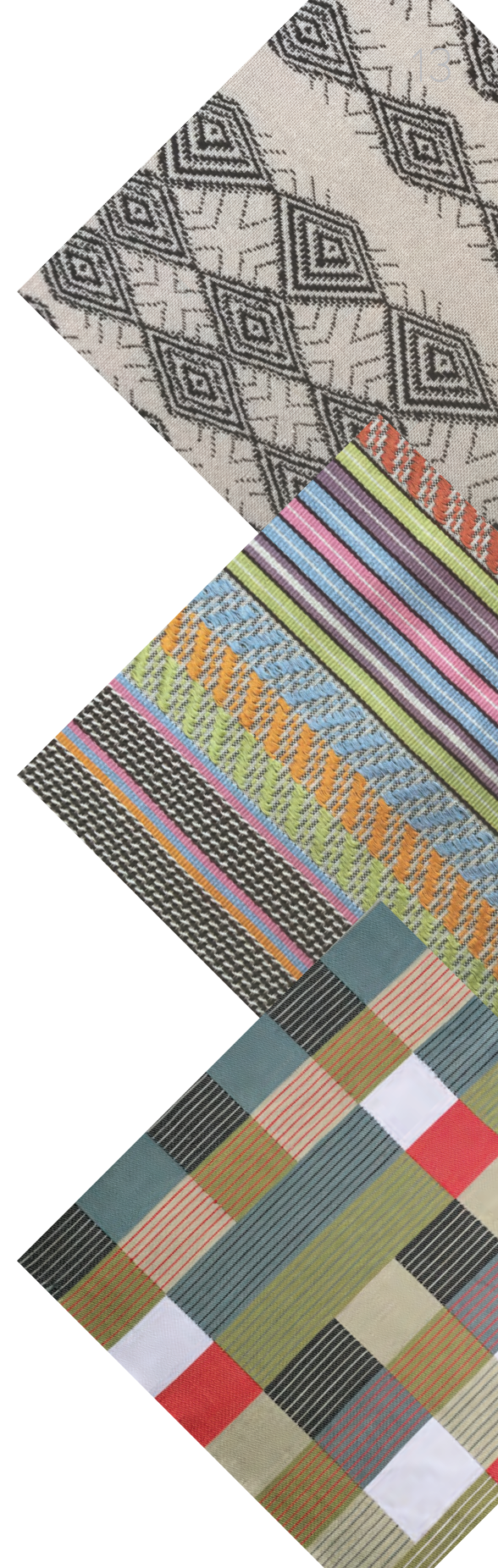
One thing I do find in schools is that the equipment children are expected to use is very cheap and underfunded. Ghostly primary-coloured paints, pens that don't work and horrible paper that makes it so hard to produce something good. It creates a barrier to success. I'm used to teaching in art schools and universities with good-quality materials and I think if children had better materials it would really help.

Basic skills in art should include more than just drawing. You need to learn how to look at things, how to differentiate between something you like and something you don't like. It's all about identifying beauty, but beauty is different for everyone, so you need to be able to identify and explain why something seems beautiful to you.

In my field you also need to learn the techniques of textile design. I design fabrics to be mass-produced and I sell them to companies – including IKEA, John Lewis, Missoni, Colefax and Fowler, and Sanderson. I provide technical samples that they then produce on power looms. I know who I'm selling to; I'm always aware of what people are wearing, what's in magazines, what people have in their homes, so I know what my customers want. I design fabrics that will fit into their collection but perhaps take them in a slightly different direction, without scaring the horses. Trend forecasting comes from the street, especially the art colleges. Those students are very good at sensing the zeitgeist; I really do believe that fashions are “in the air”.

It's incredibly important to tie education to industry. Schools should create the skills needed. Textile designers need to understand how a production mill works and what the marketplace is looking for; they need to meet and hear from people in industry, but even in mainstream education children need to emerge with useful skills.

In my opinion the government is an absolute disgrace. I think they are trying to get rid of the arts. They don't seem to understand the value of the arts or what they bring to the economy; they should pay more attention and vastly increase the budgets for arts and skills. Quite apart from the economic benefits, art makes life much, much better for individuals, particularly those from challenging backgrounds. You only need to look at the Koestler Awards for art in prisons, for which I was a judge, to see how the arts can give marginalised people a voice. The middle classes support and encourage their kids, but support and participation in the arts for children who can't access it at home must come from schools, which should be much better funded.





“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS FAILURE; ONLY FEEDBACK.”

BIDDY HODGKINSON ARTIST

Success came late to me. I had a very difficult time growing up and left school at 16. I went to Chelsea College of Arts as a mature student when I was 48. Since then I've been pinching myself that I can paint for a living!

While my early education didn't propel me into a career in art, my art teacher, Alan Rosser, insisted that I take art at O-level. He may have known something of the difficulties in my home life, but for some reason he took an interest in me that I look back on and recognise as important. He said he'd never come across someone with such an instinctive grasp of colour and one day he gave me and a handful of other pupils a palette and some spare paint and told us to take them away over the holidays and come back with a painting. I did an abstract painting of a saxophonist, really heavy paint, a bit like Auerbach or Freud. I hid it from my family, took it back to school and thought that was the end of it. Unbeknown to me, Mr Rosser had it framed and entered it into a competition under a false name. It won first prize for the whole of the north of England at a painting festival. I took it home to show my family. They hated it and absolutely ridiculed me to death. It was so hurtful and I was so embarrassed, I really didn't enjoy the validation and I brushed the whole experience under the carpet.

The point is that art shouldn't just be for people who are “good at it” when who knows what “good at it”

means in something as subjective as art. Lots of people can reproduce paintings or copy techniques but that is far, far removed from being a creative person. All of my success has come from trying to create new and original techniques, often failing along the way. Trying out something creative has value for every child, not just those who are “good” at art – we must value trying and failing and learning from that, too.

I also think creativity at school needs a wider definition. I think all schoolchildren should grow vegetables. Growing things embraces science and art – you can grow flax to make linen, and plants to make pigments – and it's good for your mental health, partly because it's quite meditative, but also because growing wonky vegetables skewers the idea that everything has to be perfect. Particularly for children who don't excel at art or sport, it gives them a space where they can participate and feel a sense of achievement.

Creative spaces at school need to be places where kids are unafraid to make a mess: a playful, informal space where experimentation is encouraged – ideally with a floor you can simply hose down at the end of the session! It doesn't have to be expensive; you can make handbags out of crisp packets, use the contents of the recycling bin for junk modelling and use fruit skins to make paints. The important thing is that art shouldn't always be about being “educational”, it should be about playing and having fun. ■

“THE THINGS YOU LEARN IN BALLET ARE INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT - THAT’S THE CONFIDENCE, THE DISCIPLINE, LEARNING TO EXERCISE YOUR WILLPOWER...”

THE CULTIVATION OF CONFIDENCE AND ENJOYMENT

Former Royal Ballet soloist Eric Underwood believes the arts offer children a space to exercise boundless creativity. Irena Barker spoke to him at London Fields Primary School.

When Eric Underwood was a child, he literally “stumbled” into ballet. He had just fluffed an acting audition at the local performing arts school in Washington, DC, and noticed some girls doing ballet through a doorway. Underwood walked in and asked the teacher to let him have a go. “I felt like I could be great at this, and that I could change my family’s destiny if I got it right,” he told *The Guardian* in 2016.

And he was great at it. His life path was changed forever, and, after years of work, he went on to become a soloist with the Royal Ballet in London, which he left in 2017. It is an incredible trajectory for a Black boy from a poor neighbourhood in DC, and one he would like to see within reach of many more children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This is why Underwood – now a model and actor living in London – devotes much of his time to promoting ballet to young people, giving up his spare time to show them its potential both as a career and for boosting well-being and confidence. He is currently a model on the books of the famous Storm model agency and is preparing for the roles of Kevin and Albert in the play *Clybourne Park* at the Park Theatre in North London next year.

An inspired young audience

When we meet, Underwood is on one of his frequent visits to London Fields Primary School, a diverse school in Hackney, East London. He has had a relationship with the school for the past five years, after teachers told him they were naming a class after him and he offered to come in.

On the day we meet, Eric first visits Year 3 pupils in “Underwood” class and admires the incredible full-scale collage they have created of him leaping across a wall as a part of their project looking at his life and work.

Next, comes the tricky Q&A session, where Underwood seems unfazed by questions such as “Do you have a six pack?” (“I work really hard at staying fit and healthy”) and “How strong do you have to be?” (“Super strong to lift the girls”). The hardest parts, he tells the enthralled class, are “Parts that other people have already danced”. It’s clear that Underwood – whose favourite role was as The Caterpillar in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* – likes to go his own way. But he is not getting out of the question-and-answer session that easily. Perhaps inevitably, a child asks him to perform the painful-sounding “air splits”. He leaps boldly into the air, very narrowly missing the chairs and desks.



Next comes a proper dance workshop led by Underwood in the school's Victorian PE hall, and he encourages the children – still dressed in their yellow-and-grey uniforms – to leap the length of the room admiring their sauté ballet moves. Every child is engaged as he explains the French terminology and the skill of “spotting” that stops dancers getting dizzy as they turn. The Year 3s jump happily around learning the jeté and other moves, and he even attempts some audience-pleasing non-ballet stunts upon request.

London Fields Primary School

“The things you learn in ballet are incredibly important – that’s the confidence, the discipline, learning to exercise your willpower,” Underwood tells me afterwards.

These primary school children, he says, could also actually become great ballet dancers if they have the opportunity to actually know about it. “It’s just off-radar for lots of people,” he observes, making it clear he thinks ballet is still much too “elitist” and lessons too expensive. “I stumbled across ballet, so if someone didn’t introduce me to it I wouldn’t have had the career I had, so I feel obligated to repay that,” he says.

He would like to see a TV programme do for ballet what *Strictly Come Dancing* has done for ballroom.

“Why not *Strictly Come Ballet*? Ballroom was taboo prior to that,” he says.

As a child with a “scattered” brain at school who disliked maths but loved creative subjects, he sees them as vital to the curriculum in schools. He comments: “The arts give children a space to exercise boundless creativity and I think this school being able to promote children going towards careers that aren’t necessarily traditional, as an accountant or a doctor, they’ve done really, really well because often people don’t tap into the arts.

“Ballet and anything artistic was an outlet for me and I remember I would draw in school, I would love that. I would get my friends’ jeans and I would draw Mickey Mouse on them. All of those classes, I worked hard at them because I enjoyed it.

“People become good at what they enjoy. The arts build your confidence in knowing that there’s something that you’re interested in, you can be great at.”



“PEOPLE BECOME
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Arts and creative curriculum

From the teachers’ point of view, Underwood’s visits are a priceless opportunity to make something potentially distant and highbrow totally relatable to children.

“It’s really important for us that we give every class a name which allows children to see people that they can identify with in roles and jobs that they can really aspire to,” says assistant head Rebecca Austin. Other classes have been named after the poet Lemn Sissay, the singer Michael Kiwanuka and the Hackney-based artist Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, among others.

The Underwood link is also part of a highly developed arts and creative curriculum that is integrated throughout the school. “Ultimately, we want the children to think like artists, we want them to think like musicians, we want them to experience what it is to be an artist or a musician and that’s then factored into our curriculum in the classroom,” says Austin.

“We’ve really established our vision for our curriculum and that it cascades out to everyone in the school, it’s really important that we all share the same vision.

“It’s not just having one person who is brilliant at art and nobody else knows what they are doing – it’s about making sure that’s rolled out throughout the whole school.”

The emphasis on the arts is evident in the school’s art weeks, whole-school art projects, gallery exhibitions and shows where children from nursery to Year 6 showcase their work. And the connection with Underwood is pride of place in the school’s work, with hundreds of children being inspired by his visits over the years.

“Children who were in Underwood class four or five years ago are still talking about him and excited about the fact that he’s back in our school,” she says; “it is truly remarkable.” ■



THE WAY CHILDREN LEARN IS CHANGING CLASSROOMS.

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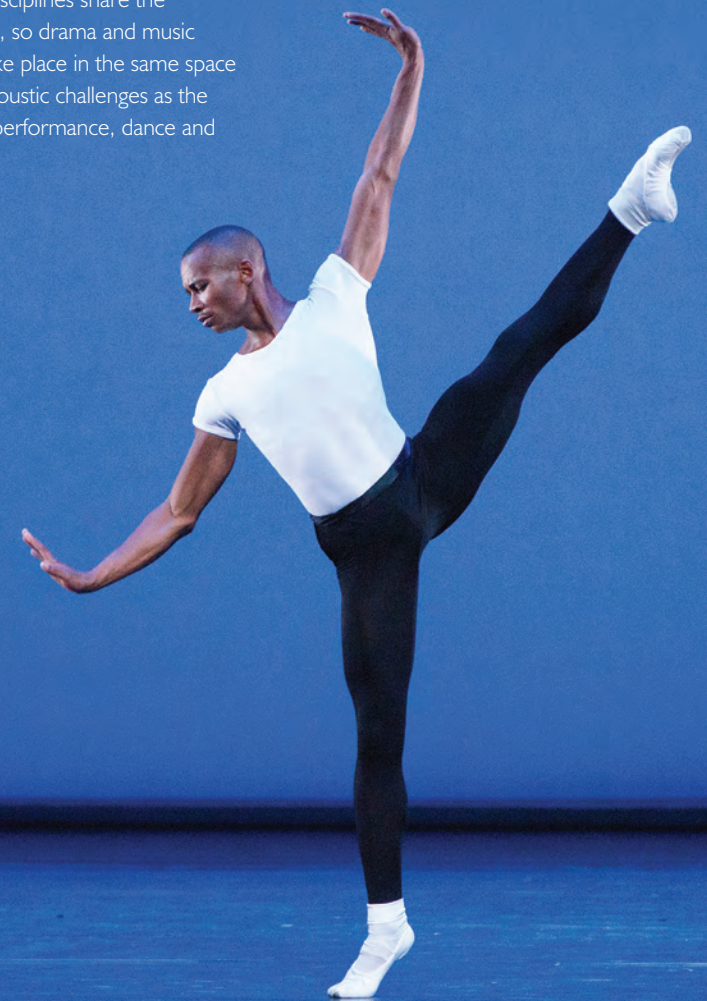
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LET'S DANCE: WHAT DOES THE PERFECT DANCE SPACE NEED?

- 1 Dance studios require a high person-to-space ratio of at least five square metres (54 square feet) per person as well as high ceilings for dance and assessment activities.
- 2 A sprung floor is always the preferred option for dance studios and the shape of the space should ideally ensure appropriate mirror provision for the size of the intended groups.
- 3 Dancers also need music, so sound and media provision are standard in such spaces and acoustics must be given due consideration too. Often in schools, performing arts disciplines share the larger performance spaces, so drama and music performances may also take place in the same space as dance. This presents acoustic challenges as the requirements for musical performance, dance and drama are different.
- 4 Despite being large, open spaces, dance studios need to be comfortable. Good lighting, effective heating, cooling and ventilation, access to drinking water and clean toilets are important considerations, as is access to changing facilities.
- 5 If audiences are to be invited in for rehearsals or performances, consider how seating and staging may be stored and accessed.
- 6 If your dance space is also a community asset, it should be easily accessible to visitors.



Music in our schools is under threat. Suzanne Kyle explores the reasons why and finds out if anything can be done to stop the decline.

THE SOUND OF SILENCE?

A life without music is, for many, unthinkable. From the radio in the kitchen to the stadium rock gig, concerts, musicals and movie scores, the soundtrack to our lives is a treasured archive. As well as being Shakespeare's "food of love", music is a richly rewarding subject to study. From learning an instrument, playing and singing in ensembles large and small, to studying music theory, analysis, composition and history, the evolution of music since medieval times provides deep resources covering multiple disciplines that enable its students to develop a wide range of useful skills. The technical side of music recording and production adds another important string to this already substantial bow.

Music also provides social and emotional benefits. Singing and playing together is a way of communicating and expressing feelings that builds confidence and self-esteem as well as enhancing a sense of inclusivity and belonging. Not to mention the skills of teamwork, collaboration and the discipline instilled by practising to improve, all of which are inherent in the study and performance of music. And not forgetting that the music industry contributes over £5 billion to the UK economy and plays a central role in the culture of every single country in the world.

A subject in decline

In light of its multitudinous benefits and remarkable influence, you might imagine music would occupy priority status in schools. Sadly, this is not the case and the future for music in UK schools is looking uncertain. A recent study by Birmingham City University and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire suggests that, if the

current rate of decline continues, Music A-level may disappear from UK state (government-funded) schools altogether by 2033. Figures from Ofqual, England's exam regulator, show that GCSE Music entries have declined by 35 per cent in the last 12 years (from 54,000 in 2008 to 35,000 in 2020). A-level Music entries have declined by half in the last decade, from 10,000 to 5,000 with a disproportionately large number of those entries coming from independent (non-government-funded) schools. The pipeline of skilled musicians needed to sustain the industry is under threat and an important educational opportunity is in danger of being lost. On a more positive note, the number of children studying Music BTEC Level 2 and 3 has risen and these qualifications are valued by both higher education institutions and the music industry itself.

The funding constraint

Schools in England are judged, primarily, on their performance at the end of Key Stage 4, particularly by prospective parents. Failing to nail the numbers at GCSE means fewer pupils enrolling, which means less funding, hence the laser focus on exam results. This focus means that many schools have moved to a two-year Key Stage 3 (Years 7 and 8) and a three-year Key Stage 4 (Years 9, 10 and 11) to boost their GCSE results. As well as the fight to secure good GCSE results, schools are battling funding cuts that impact on the subject choices available at A-level. In England, if schools want to run A-level Music, they have to weigh up whether it is financially viable to run what is often a small course with fewer than ten students.





Paul Guénault, a former headteacher, is now Director of Music for the Buckinghamshire Music Trust, which runs music centres and works with schools to provide musical tuition and support. He explains why this combination of curriculum priorities and funding challenges has such an impact on the study of music:

“In Year 8, when a child is choosing their GCSEs, they may only have had one term of music if it’s on a carousel with other arts subjects, which is unlikely to be enough time to consider it for GCSE. Children who have music tuition at junior school (up to age 11) are ahead of the game here, so it’s the ones who don’t get music lessons at junior school who lose out. Having a really strong KS3 music curriculum that is empowering and accessible for all students is the biggest and most pressing priority. If you get that right, then more children will continue their musical learning in KS4 and KS5.”

“The changes to Sixth-Form funding mean that in most schools it is financially unviable for children to do four A-levels. A lot of kids who would have done music as their fourth A-level no longer have that option. Schools are no longer able to claw back funding for AS-levels so even doing music as an AS is no longer possible. As numbers decrease at A-level, that impacts on GCSE choices and on parental perceptions of what’s valuable.” Sheila Cornall, former director of music at Wycombe High School for Girls, a selective grammar school in Buckinghamshire with a thriving music department, says a senior leadership team that values music is vital to overcome these barriers:

“We were very fortunate at Wycombe High to have a head who found a way round the funding cuts to enable Music A-level to continue by reducing contact time, but the decline in numbers doesn’t surprise me. The EBacc [English Baccalaureate] means students are left with so few choices at GCSE; it’s art or music, not both, so it’s no wonder numbers are dropping and if they don’t take Music at GCSE, they won’t do it at A-level.”

Cornall believes the depth of Music as a subject may not be fully understood. “Music is seen by some as an ‘airy-fairy’ add-on, a ‘frill’ subject,” she says. “But it’s one of the toughest subjects to study because it demands such a range of skills. You’ve got to be able to write essays, compose, analyse music, play an instrument, know the history and theory. Even high-flying students say it’s their hardest A-level, but also very rewarding.”

Creativity and continuous improvement

The arts, including music, are about far more than exams and qualifications. As well as the social, emotional and cultural benefits that the arts bring to the life of a school, the skills developed in the study of creative subjects can deliver benefits across the curriculum.

Paul Guénault believes “warm critique and multiple draft” and “peer and self-assessment” can play a role in every subject. “Musicians in particular are constantly receiving feedback as they seek to improve, and the same is true in art and drama,” he says. “If those skills could be applied to other subject areas, it would instigate a culture of continuous improvement, driven by peer review, which we know increases engagement and pushes students to raise their game.”

As well as integrating these “creative skills” into other subjects, Paul believes that stripping out repetition in the Key Stage 3 curriculum could create more space for arts subjects and increase collaboration across subject areas. “In one of my schools, we looked at the whole curriculum across all subjects and found that the water cycle was taught four times in KS3 in different subject areas,” he explains. “That’s not only boring, it’s a colossal waste of time that could be allocated to the arts. The impact of having no carousels and smaller groups in KS3 arts timetables would be significant. We also need to ring-fence funding for music. Just as primary schools receive a sports premium, they should have a part of their budget that must be dedicated to music and the arts.”

With a leadership team that believes in the value of studying music, greater collaboration across subject areas and ring-fenced funding, the remaining vital ingredients are the passion and commitment of music teachers. Sheila Cornall says her time at Wycombe High was her “dream job” but leading a music department is not for the faint-hearted. “You’re there before school, after school and during lunch breaks. Rehearsals and performances eat into weekends, and that’s all on top of teaching, but when you’ve got 130 children in a choir singing their hearts out or you know you’re providing a haven for a kid who’s struggling to find their niche – it’s magic.” ■

“MUSIC IS SEEN BY SOME AS AN ‘AIRY FAIRY’ ADD-ON... BUT IT’S ONE OF THE TOUGHEST SUBJECTS TO STUDY BECAUSE IT DEMANDS SUCH A RANGE OF SKILLS.”

Making the grade?

When Sheila Cornall oversaw the design and build of the new Music Centre at Wycombe High School, fundraising efforts for the new building included a “Grade 1-athon”, where teachers in all subjects were challenged to learn an instrument and take their Grade 1 exam. In total, 53 members of staff took the exam, but the dropout rate was high, with many participants expressing amazement at how hard they found learning an instrument. Some resorted to memorising their set-pieces so they could fail the sight-reading, scales and aural parts of the exam and still pass. Perhaps this offers a good metaphor for teaching to the test: just because you can pass the exam doesn’t mean you’re any good at your subject.

Sources: *A-level music decline and disadvantage attainment gaps*, Dr Adam Whittaker, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Professor Martin Fautley, Birmingham City University, Birmingham Music Education Research Group, July 2021. Singup.org

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THE DAYS OF
SCRATCHING OUT
A CHORALE ON
MANUSCRIPT PAPER ARE
OVER...

PLAY ON!

How to build the perfect space for music

Flexible space...

Space that can flex from teaching to rehearsal to performance is vital. Large ensembles need big spaces, both acoustically and to accommodate players. Singers can bunch up a bit but instrumental players need room to spread out, and you don't want to be sitting too close to the brass or percussion section when they hit their crescendo. At Wycombe High, acoustic partitions are used to divide or open up the main space to suit various functions.

...with good acoustics

As well as a decent footprint, it goes without saying that music needs to sound good in the space. A completely dead space is fine for recording but less so for performance, where a degree of reverb helps support the sound.

Storage

Musicians don't travel light. Music departments need to house a library of sheet music and scores, chairs, stools and music stands, enough keyboards, glockenspiels, drums or ukuleles for a whole class – you simply cannot have too much storage, especially if you want a neat and tidy space for a public performance.



Dedicated space

Sharing spaces with other departments can be a great way of building relationships and sharing resources but being unable to access a space for practice or performance is an enormous hindrance to musicians. They need their own dedicated space that is always available.

Technology

The days of scratching out a chorale on manuscript paper are over. Keyboards linked to software make musical notation much easier. The ability to record and even broadcast performances is also essential, ideally every practice room and performance space should be linked to the recording facility.

Soundproofing

If you've got multiple groups of people in the building, all playing, singing and teaching at the same time, you absolutely must have excellent soundproofing or it's impossible to concentrate. Doors and HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) are two areas that can be overlooked when it comes to soundproofing, with the ducting for heating and ventilation capable of transferring sound as well as air. Inferior doors can reduce the effectiveness of other soundproofing measures, so don't skimp on them.

“REAL CHANGE TAKES TIME AND IT’S THE BRAVE, BOLD, RISK-TAKING OUTLIERS WHO DO THE HARDEST YARDS OF SHIFTING ENTRENCHED VALUES AND APPROACHES.”

TOO SPECIAL TO MEASURE

A school designed to put creativity at the heart of its curriculum won an award for its iconic building. Are the benefits of this approach to learning being recognised through our current inspection criteria? Murray Hudson finds out.

In 2016, architects Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios won a RIBA South West Award for its arresting new building designed to house the Plymouth School of Creative Arts (PSCA), a four–16 mainstream, city centre, all-through school sponsored by Plymouth College of Art, in the southwest of England. This was a school designed to put creativity at the heart of all subjects; where learning by making would apply as much to English and maths as it did to art and cookery. The ethos of the school rejected the idea of art and creativity as “bounded” subjects, instead seeing their application as the key to unlocking the entire curriculum. For example, before studying *Macbeth* in English, the pupils explored the landscape and weather of the moors by producing a vast mural. Drawing was seen as a process of learning in the same way that writing can be; as a way of recording, enquiring and illustrating.





Connected learning spaces

The 74,486-square-foot (6,920-square-metre) building was described by the RIBA judges as “a large school in a single wrapper, with a diversity of spaces including a long-span large-volume hall, theatre, dance studio, technical spaces et al neatly stitched together in a free-flowing plan”. Large-scale classroom spaces were designed around the philosophy of team teaching, with three teachers and 75 children sharing sub-divisible spaces. Working to an extremely tight budget, the school was delivered for around a third of the cost of a project procured through the Building Schools for the Future Programme.

When Gary Spracklen, Innovation Director for A4LE, visited the school in 2016, he found it to be: “...a beautiful harmony of large open spaces to support learning alongside specialist spaces and studios all equipped with the latest tools and technology to enable better learning. Light floods into this building and as I enter I cannot help but be impressed with the calm



but bright first impression. As I look into a large atrium space, I'm inspired by beautiful, high-quality artwork – a mix of learner work and visiting artists.”

He also observed: “Connection is an important element of learning at the Plymouth School of Creative Arts where online learning is an entitlement for all. The school adopts a Project Based Learning approach to the National Curriculum which in itself is not new, but the unique blend is most definitely distinctive. The school itself defines its approach via the categories of: Making to Learn, Studio Ecology, Individual and Different Learning & Development, Intrinsic Responsibility for Learning, Systematic Approach to the Learning Strategy and Continuum of Creative Practice.

“Throughout the building, polished concrete floors continue the ‘studio’ feel while also providing cost benefits to the build. The floor provides a sense of connection, while natural finishes and clear signage denote different spaces – a particular favourite of mine being the ‘Culinary Art Studio’ for Food Technology.”



The school’s first Ofsted inspection report said: “In line with the school’s vision, the pupils quickly learn to lead their own learning by working things out for themselves, under the guidance of the teacher. They are totally engaged in, and enjoy, the activities. This contributes to their good behaviour and growing confidence.”

Death of a creative dream

The dream for this extraordinary school and its ambitious building came to a difficult end in January 2019 when the school was placed into special measures, with an Ofsted inspection declaring it “inadequate” in every category. Ofsted ruled that too many pupils were making “insufficient progress”, classroom disruption was too high and persistent absence was also a major issue. Forced to join a multi-academy trust, the school was taken over by new leadership. As one parent told the local newspaper: “The school we loved and chose for our children because of its creative approach has changed, for the worse, beyond recognition. Our dream of a more

creative approach to education has died, we are deeply saddened by what is happening to the school.”

When the closure of PSCA was first announced, pupils, teachers and parents staged a protest, creating colourful banners and placards declaring the school “Too Special To Measure” and that “Creativity Takes Courage”. One showed a quote, erroneously attributed to Einstein, which said: “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life thinking it is stupid.”

PSCA is not the first school to try a bold new approach and fail. Real change takes time and it’s the brave, bold, risk-taking outliers who do the hardest yards of shifting entrenched values and approaches. Ofsted’s new framework will judge schools on their ability to provide a “broad and balanced curriculum”. It’s hard not to wonder how PSCA might have fared under these new and different criteria? ■

“...THE CONCEPT OF UBIQUITY REFERS TO THE AVAILABILITY OF AND ACCESS TO ART THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL, WELL INTEGRATED INTO EVERY PART OF THE CURRICULUM AND FULLY ENMESHED IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT.”



Prakash Nair and Louis Serota from leading architects Education Design International, explore their three essential components for the design of arts-based learning spaces in schools.

UBIQUITY, VARIETY AND CREATIVITY

It was not so long ago when art instruction in schools was considered less important than the “real” purpose of education: to help students master subjects like science and mathematics. This trend is being rapidly reversed as the evidence mounts regarding the value of the arts in the school curriculum for learners up to the age of 18. Sufficient data exists to overwhelmingly support the belief that study and participation in the fine arts is a key component in improving learning throughout all academic areas. Evidence of its effectiveness in reducing student dropout, raising student attendance, developing better team players, fostering a love for learning, improving greater student dignity, enhancing student creativity and producing a citizen more prepared for the workplace of tomorrow has been documented in studies held in many varied settings, from school campuses to corporate America.



The fine arts also provide learners with non-academic benefits such as promoting self-esteem, motivation, aesthetic awareness, cultural exposure, creativity and improved emotional expression, as well as social harmony and an appreciation of diversity¹. Similar benefits² have been attributed to the performing arts such as music and drama. Those benefits include:

- Better memory
- Improved hand-to-eye coordination
- More engagement in school
- More success in society
- Emotional development
- Pattern-recognition skills
- Building of imagination and curiosity
- Relaxing
- Building discipline
- Teamwork
- Self-confidence

Arts spaces in traditional schools are often set up in ways that limit their utility and reduce the benefits noted above. For example, while it is definitely a good idea for schools to have dedicated art rooms, they are less effective when such rooms are just repurposed classrooms not specifically designed for art. In this article we will demonstrate, using actual examples, why an approach that incorporates the ideas of ubiquity, variety

and creativity is essential when planning and designing schools to fully embrace and celebrate the arts.

Ubiquity

Because art has the potential to enrich every subject, the concept of ubiquity refers to the availability of and access to art throughout the school, well integrated into every part of the curriculum and fully enmeshed in the built environment. Here are some specific ways in which the concept of ubiquity can be expressed in school design:

- Display of student work: This can be a student-created sculpture at the entrance to the school, a prominent display of student artwork in the entrance lobby or in school hallways, or a formal exhibition of student work.
- “Art Everywhere”: Spaces are designed so that art can happen anywhere, such as in the commons area of the school and also in classrooms and adjoining areas where students spend so much of their time. The “Art Everywhere” concept goes beyond just providing opportunities for students to do art in different parts of the school. It is also about making the whole school more “artistic” from a design standpoint.

Variety

The idea of variety refers to the various types of art and how spaces that are tailored to fit those specific needs are more likely to be successful. “Arts” is a generic term

but, in fact, different kinds of art have different spatial needs. The more specialised the spaces become, the more effectively they can cater to activities. Ideally, there needs to be different spaces for drawing and painting; sculpture; fashion design; building and making; and performing arts like music and drama.

Creativity

It is especially important to be creative when it comes to properly designing schools for a good arts curriculum. While artistically designed buildings themselves play a role in creating the proper ambience for studies that emphasise art, it is important not to stop there. When it comes to existing buildings having to be redesigned to better integrate the arts into the everyday life of students, creativity becomes essential. Leysin American School in Switzerland was able to creatively redesign an old, abandoned hotel/sanatorium building into a school with a wonderful arts studio. Similarly, the American School of Bombay overcame the limitations of its old building, previously used as a dormitory, to create a Black Box theatre and “sky studios” for art on the roof. In his 2006 book, *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink predicted that: “The future belongs to a different kind of person with a different kind of mind: artists, inventors, storytellers – creative and holistic ‘right-brain’ thinkers whose abilities mark the fault line between who gets ahead and who doesn’t.” Pink’s prediction is

now moving towards realisation at breakneck speed, even as schools are caught in facilities optimised for a standardised curriculum and out of sync with the new imperative to nurture students’ creativity and problem-solving skills. School redesign that focuses on arts-based spaces to make them functional and inspirational could be the best place to begin a journey of transformation that the whole educational enterprise desperately needs. ■

Prakash Nair, AIA, is the Founding President and CEO and Louis Sirota, AIA, is the Director of Design at Education Design International, an innovative school design firm with award-winning consultations in 52 countries on six continents.

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¹ “The Importance of Fine Arts Education”, KATY Independent School District, compiled by Bob Bryant. <http://www.katyisd.org/dept/finearts/Pages/The-Importance-of-Fine-Arts-Education-.aspx>
² “The Benefits of Music Education” by Laura Lewis Brown. PBS for Parents. <http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/music-arts/the-benefits-of-music-education/>



EMPOWERING CHILDREN AS CREATORS PROVIDES THEM WITH HARD SKILLS ACROSS PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL SCIENCES AS WELL AS SOFTER SKILLS SUCH AS RESILIENCE, TEAMWORK AND CONFIDENCE.

OUTSIDE IN

Art is breaking out of the classroom, inspiring children and connecting communities through organisations that use art to fuel creative and charitable endeavours. Suzanne Kyle reports.

In 1999, the first Cow Parade took place in Chicago. London followed in 2002, hosting the popular public art event that saw life-sized fibreglass cows, with artists and designers commissioned by each cow's sponsor to decorate their member of the herd, dotted across the capital and sold off at the end of the exhibition to raise money for charity. Cities around the world have hosted their own Cow Parades and in the summer of 2021 it landed in New York for its 100th exhibition. Over the intervening years public art events have grown and the companies that produce these exhibitions are creating opportunities to break down the barriers around "art", sometimes perceived as elitist and inaccessible, and engaging schoolchildren in creative projects with horizons beyond the classroom.

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If you were in Cambridge, UK, over the summer you may have seen one of a herd of 90 highly decorated fibreglass cows dotted around the city. These were part of Wild In Art’s “Cows About Cambridge” exhibition, which as well as raising money for charity, aims to encourage the whole community to engage and participate in art, including schoolchildren. Local primary schools participated in the project by decorating “mini moos”, smaller versions of the cow sculptures. For ten weeks “Cows about Cambridge” created a colourful trail across the city where children saw their creations alongside those painted by local artists. At the end of the exhibition the “mini moos” were returned to the schools and community groups participating in the project and the full-size model cows were auctioned off. Wild In Art champions the importance of art for everyone and offers learning programmes alongside its exhibitions with downloadable resources and lesson plans that use the theme of the exhibition as an entry point to learning. To date more than 850,000 young people have taken part, while over £2.4 million has been contributed to creative communities. Gretton School, a school for children and young people

with autism, participated in “Cows About Cambridge”. Teacher Natalie Easton said: “It was great to know that we were working separately to meet the needs and aspirations of our school setting but simultaneously we were also working within a wider project context; we had shared goals with other schools and local artists too. It gave our pupils a sense of belonging, being part of a larger community especially after all the isolation and loneliness that has come about from lockdowns and all the Covid restrictions. Being part of a well-organised and impressive community project was empowering for the students; they were so proud that their work was on display in such a public setting alongside professional artists!” Susan Conroy, Head of Art at St Mary’s School Cambridge, said: “It is a privilege to be part of such a large-scale art project and knowing our students have played an integral role in the design and creation of a mini moo. Public art is such an important way of bringing communities together and getting people to be part of collective experience. “Cows About Cambridge” has enabled us to creatively express what we feel is important to our school community whilst supporting ‘Break’ charity.”

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PLANNING LEARNING
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Dream on

Another organisation that is using art and a love of making things as a means of connecting communities is the Institute of Imagination (iOi), a London-based children and families' charity that "champions the power of creativity to build skills and wellbeing". The charity delivers learning experiences across the arts, sciences and digital technologies aiming to "empower children today to build a more sustainable world tomorrow".

The iOi recently moved to the East London borough of Newham and runs workshops for local children, families, schools and educators. Around 2,000 primary school children participated in the "Big Build" project to design and build seven large-scale sculptures representing hope and celebration in the wake of the pandemic. Danish-born artist Anne Harild, who lives in East Ham, helped bring the children's vision for the

project to life and the sculptures were erected in key civic centres across the borough during the summer. Newham was one of the London boroughs hardest hit by the pandemic and the iOi's creative programmes aim to empower its residents with the opportunity to rebuild their cultural community together.

As well as helping hard-hit communities rebuild their sense of cohesion after the pandemic, the iOi believes that "empowering children as creators provides them with hard skills across physical and digital sciences as well as softer skills such as resilience, teamwork and confidence". The prioritisation of creative skills is also recognised by the World Economic Forum, which included "collaboration, curiosity, creativity and critical thinking" on its list of twenty first century survival skills for young people. ■



DESIGNING A SPACE TO EMPOWER LEARNERS TO ENGAGE THEIR ASPIRATIONS

Thom Conaty outlines his work as part of a collaborative project with Planning Learning Spaces in Practice and Gesher School to design an integrated learning environment that acts as a hub for maker-centred learning for the school and community.

Gesher School, situated in northwest London, is an Ofsted “Outstanding” primary school currently expanding into an all-through school for learners from four to 16 years of age. The school caters for students with a range of mild to moderate special educational needs (SEN), including autism, ADHD, dyslexia and Down’s Syndrome.

A reimagined ecosystem

Gesher is reimagining the way young people with SEN are educated. Its approach is focused on a learner-centred curriculum that encourages engagement and empowerment and is designed to develop the whole person and balances “head, heart and hand”. As an all-through school there is recognition of the importance of developing a maker culture as part of the learners’ experience, and every curriculum and project-based activity promotes multidisciplinary approaches that are integral to learning.

A maker hub for school and community.

The design of the new makerspace at Gesher has been a collaborative activity and it will act as a “hub” for the school and community. It fosters innovation, creation and curiosity and the integrated design ensures its leading-edge facilities can support all aspects of the life and work of the school. It will promote the sharing of ideas, projects and activities across the school with parents, local projects and the business community. The makerspace has been zoned to support the process of design thinking within the primary curriculum and provide the specialist facilities needed to ensure progression for secondary learners.

The zoning ensures that specialist areas requiring safety and support for learners can be established with good visual connections. It recognises the importance of a quiet and calm reflective space to meet personal needs and to ensure sensory and emotional regulation. Sliding screens allow zones to adapt to changing activities and use of space.



DESIGN THINKING ZONE
LEARNERS AND MENTORS COLLABORATE
ON A COMMUNITY PROJECT

The four zones of the makerspace

The makerspace is structured into four dynamic, functionally complementary and visually interconnected zones. Sliding, floor-to-ceiling acoustic glass panels enable the spatial and sensory properties of the space to be easily and quickly adjusted. Although adaptability is a key function of the entire hub, each of the four zones has been designed to meet the sensory needs of students and to accommodate each of the distinct stages and processes required for design, making, creative innovation and project development.

- 1 The Node: communication, construction and creative collaboration.
- 2 The Factory: manufacturing.
- 3 The Design Thinking Zone: ideation, prototyping, testing and documenting.
- 4 Reimagine Zone: research, reflection and personal engagement.

The choice of furnishing, and equipment has been made to enable the adaptable functionality of the zones

and encourage multiple modes of working and to promote creative idea-sharing and collaboration.

Sensory challenges play a significant role in the learning experience of students with SEN, so lighting and acoustics have been designed to complement the zones and create sympathetic sensory conditions.

The Design Thinking Zone (3) enables the makerspace to act as a hub to promote engagement across the school and community. Whiteboard surfaces throughout, smart projector, tablets and access to dozens of prototyping and construction kits, support learners to freely explore the design thinking process.

The available flat wall space allows the zone to double as a media lab with green screen for streaming and creating audio-visual presentations. Digital technologies will be a critical enabler for maker activities within the school and community.

The zone will enhance the richness and depth of the Gesher curriculum through developing more



THE FACTORY
A LEARNER SEES THEIR DIGITAL CREATION
COME TO LIFE VIA 3D PRINTING.

STEAM-focused approaches and act as a catalyst to encourage relevant and real-life projects.

Open access to the Reimagining Zone (4) and the Node (1) enables learners to naturally navigate and be supported between all design and making processes.

Putting “make” in the makerspace

This zone is where learners can bring their ideas and digital designs into a physical reality. With tools and materials at arm’s reach, and on visual display throughout, this zone greatly increases opportunities for learners to achieve a direct hands-on approach. Natural wood panelling, acoustic glass and industrial flooring indicates this is a place where learners can explore, create and test out their design products.

All the materials, tools and modern fabrication equipment for rapid prototyping and manufacturing are available:

- 3D printers, laser cutter, CNC and fabric cutter
- Traditional hand tools for measuring, cutting, securing and finishing
- Electronics, interactive technologies and test equipment.

This zone is visible to others working in the makerspace. Its design recognises that learners of all

ages working in the Factory Zone (2) will need to be supported and managed while using this equipment.

The duty of care in working with learners is paramount and the design makes the needed specialist equipment accessible in a safe and secure zone. Students at Gesher are differently able and their learning experiences need to be supported in different ways. The design of the Factory zone within the space will allow individual learners to experience practical design realisation throughout the four–16 age range of the school curriculum and demonstrate personalised approaches to design thinking. The Factory zone provides an environment that ensures students can develop the skills for the future workplace and the realisation of their own personal projects. It will play a major role within the hub in developing social enterprise activity and creating real-life solutions to local challenges.

The Factory zone is designed to be visible and to have a comfortable working environment with good air quality and ventilation to deal with the range of practical activities taking place. A large digital screen with a webcam connects the Factory to the rest of the maker hub and the wider school and community environment.



THE NODE

The Node

Adjacent to the Design Thinking Zone, with sliding door access to the Factory on one side, the Node is the entry point to the makerspace. A sliding glass panel enables the zone to be acoustically isolated from the rest of the hub.

The Node acts as a launchpad for school-wide communications and interaction within all the zones of the hub and its resources. It promotes the sharing of ideas and collaborative activities across all aspects of the school curriculum.

A suite of tablets and 2-in-1 laptops, as well as an interactive whiteboard with conferencing technologies, allow for engaging real-time learning and audio-visual communications. Agile and varied seating and mobile folding desks enable quick and easy transitions between collaborative, small group and individual activity. Extensive storage and mobile storage solutions have been developed to ensure ease of access to the wide range of resources and equipment that will be available in the hub.

Reimagine Zone

The Reimagine Zone is designed as a mindful space with warm, adjustable lighting, a vertical garden and comfortable floor space where learners can quietly

focus, reflect and engage in personal learning. Two high-spec computers enable digital research, design and media editing.

The furnishings in this zone (including access to industrial noise-cancelling headphones) encourage learners to find a comfortable space and time for themselves. It provides space to be supported, to read, conduct digital research, take time to reflect, practice mindfulness or just take time out. A variety of seating options have been provided within the space. Warm lighting, wood flooring and a large rug promote a calm, welcoming atmosphere.

A vertical garden and hanging plants in this space (and throughout the hub) support the ambience, make for a healthier working environment and offer the learners a physical and mental connection with the natural environment.

The makerspace as a hub connecting learning.

The makerspace has been designed to be a resource for the school and community. It is intended to locate it in a position adjacent to a studio space that will support learning across the full school age of learners. Establishing a maker culture as part of all learners’ experiences at every stage of their development is critical to children and young people at Gesher, so

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REIMAGINE ZONE

that learners are qualified for the next stage of their development with a deep knowledge in academic and vocational disciplines, through designing, experimenting, building and inventing in science, computing and engineering through real-life project activities. In addition to this, the makerspace provides an opportunity to liberate and affirm students' areas of aptitude and passion. Effective integration is critical to ensure a makerspace culture is deeply embedded across the whole school and that it extends beyond the campus, connecting the school with the local community. Project management equipment and technology, as well as practical resources such as Rover trolleys, will support connectivity of the space and distribution of its resources within the wider school by enabling tools, materials and projects in development to be easily transported from the makerspace to wherever they are needed.

As Gesher continues to build upon its practice and develop its offering as a community hub and Centre of Excellence, it is hoped that the makerspace and its associated resources and spaces will act as a focus to achieve these aims within the school and its learning community. ■

“THE VALUE OF EXPERIENTIAL, HANDS-ON LEARNING IS PRIZED AT GESHER, WHERE WHAT CHILDREN CAN DO AND MAKE, INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLABORATIVELY, IS AS ESTEEMED AS WHAT THEY KNOW.”

The makerspace at Gesher has been made possible through the generous support of the Wolfson Family Charitable Trust.

Thom Conaty is a Planning Learning Spaces Associate, designer and professional trainer.

He supports communities, schools and higher education institutions to bring education into the twenty-first Century.

Transforming a learning space at Trumpington Park Primary School in Cambridge was always going to be a challenge during a pandemic. Terry White and Bhavini Pandya invited local architects and school leaders to explain how they did it in a special evening workshop.

A MEETING OF MINDS

The Cambridge Centre for Learning Spaces Innovation is a unique space, housed on the upper floor of the historic Newnham Mill, on the edge of the city's famous "Backs". The acoustic technology installed in the centre contrasts with the wooden vaulted ceiling and whitewashed brickwork, making it the perfect example of an intelligently repurposed space.

The appropriateness of this new-old venue will not have escaped those attending a recent gathering there of teachers, architects and other experts. They came together in November 2021 to share their experiences of a groundbreaking project which is helping schools translate their educational vision into practical and effective learning spaces.

Teachers from the nearby Trumpington Park Primary School, which was one of the pilot schools to follow the Planning Learning Spaces in Practice (PLSiP) Design Framework, described their first-hand experience of the process. Alicia Whata, from Grey Lynn School in Auckland, New Zealand, also appeared by video link to outline her school's highly positive experiences of the pilot.

Schools taking part were invited to work closely with experts to design and develop test spaces – introducing different layouts, furniture and equipment – and measure the effects of those spaces on the staff and students using them.

Trumpington has completed the process, thanks to the commitment and enthusiasm of headteacher Mel Shute, and Year 4 teachers Anna Patuck and Emma

Norman. The Planning Learning Spaces team, including co-directors Bhavini Pandya and Terry White, recently helped the school transform an ordinary classroom with standard desks into a multi-zoned space with flexible furniture designed to encourage collaboration and independent learning.

Headteacher Mel Shute told the event she felt "really lucky" to have been part of the pilot, which includes a series of workshops, the first of which helps staff establish the vision and values of the school. She said: "In our first workshop, we weren't really sure where we were going, but it was so essential and when I look back now it was one of the best talking moments: what's really important at our school? How do we articulate that? How do you see that as you walk around our learning spaces?"

Staff settled on two key values, including pupil collaboration and ownership of learning. She said the process of reflection had also made them think about how their teaching might have been hindering what they wanted to see. By the end of the project, its success was obvious, she said, and they were now working on using it for other areas of the school.

Teachers Anna Patuck and Emma Norman made a practical presentation to the event, using furniture to illustrate the specific changes they had made to the classroom and the effect they had had. Large tables were replaced with small, moveable triangular desks with writable surfaces that join together to form a larger table, enabling both group and individual work.

A GROUND-BREAKING PROJECT WHICH IS HELPING SCHOOLS TRANSLATE THEIR EDUCATIONAL VISION INTO PRACTICAL AND EFFECTIVE LEARNING SPACES

A cloakroom area had been transformed into a "quiet zone" and a separate "collaborative zone" had a whiteboard wall to help children work together. There was also a "support zone" in addition to the main area of desks. Other options offered around the classroom included a high table and a quirky tiered seating storage unit, topped with pleasingly sensory artificial grass.

Norman told the event that their big rectangular tables had been holding them back before the refit and the room set up had been encouraging an overly teacher-led approach. Patuck explained how the use of zones encouraged ownership of learning by offering children choice over how and where they learn and also how they sit. Patuck perhaps summarised the teachers' attitude to the changes best: "The whole process has really been fantastic, you get really stuck in certain ways. It's just the space that allows it to happen; it was amazing to see. We are delighted with the outcomes."

Working environment expert Professor Peter Barrett, who evaluated the pilot at Trumpington as it unfolded, also joined the event by video link and said that it had been an "extraordinary achievement" to complete it during the pandemic. He highlighted the initial indications that the new room format actually improved academic progress.

"The impact was absolutely striking," he said. "Small changes have really really big impacts. It has been monumentally successful." ■



on reflection

POST-PANDEMIC LEARNING

Sometimes people forget that schools are filled with post-graduate-qualified, exceptional, learning professionals. When it comes to making learning happen, there is no other body – not companies, not universities, not ministries of education and certainly not policy groups – that contains the necessary “feet-on-the-ground, day-to-day experience” and intellectual clout needed. The best evolution of our learning spaces has come, almost always, from the bottom up. Far more stunning learning places and spaces have evolved from their community of learners than from ministerial direction. Covid-19 has not changed that; indeed, it has accentuated the gap between resilient practice and leaden policy.

But as we emerge from a pandemic, and plunge next into climate catastrophe, every organisation is racing to reinvent itself as a learning organisation. The “new normal” they speak of has learning at its heart. Ingenuity, resilience, mutuality, engagement, collaboration are suddenly expected to be buzzing around the water cooler in a way that productivity alone did previously. As Ulrik Juul Christensen, the blended learning design expert, wrote in *Forbes* back in February 2021: “As

business leaders look to the ‘next normal’ post-pandemic — amid greater digitization and accelerated roll-out of advanced technologies that change the nature of work — they must push for learning to evolve.”

So where might these Johnny-come-lately learning organisations find effective learning practice? In their neighbouring schools of course. Although a few schools have come through the pandemic with a kind of death wish (“let’s get back to how we were”), most of them have looked around for fresh approaches. They have harnessed technology seamlessly, have realised the advantages of Zoomed parents’ evenings, embraced asynchronous shared challenges, delighted in synchronous activity “hooks”, assembled tiered seats for moments of direct instruction, experimented with telepresence screens for their nativity plays, walked around their carousel of activities, and much more.

And this is where it gets exciting: there is a mass of empty corporate and retail space at the heart of our communities. It is available. I have spent the last few days with others seeking just such a space for a professional learning centre. We are spoiled for choice. As we seize these spaces for schools too – perhaps to cope with the Covid baby boom (what else to do during lockdown when the Netflix catalogue had been exhausted?) – they have the potential to pollinate learning into the heart of our communities. I remember in Dumfries & Galloway, guided by the children’s wishes, the council opened a makerspace in an empty shop. The day it opened there were faces of parents pressed against the window and local employers showed immediate interest too.

Getting our learning spaces right is suddenly about getting our communities and our businesses right too. We lead that. It’s a time to stand up proud and show what we know.

Professor Stephen Heppell is CEO of Heppell.net and holds the Felipe Segovia Chair of Learning Innovation at Universidad Camilo José Cela, Madrid.



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