Cultural Connections: celebrating diversity and widening access through arts education  
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Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference,  
Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, 3-6 September 2008

INTRODUCTION

Human beings constantly create or construct new mental representations, and so the  
content of the mind is by its nature an open, infinitely expandable category (Gardner,  
2006:21)

Cultural Connections is a key factor in a model of education which addresses not only children’s  
aademic progress, but also their development across emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual  
dimensions. This ‘holistic’ approach to education informs the 2004 Children Act and the policy  
The educational agenda seeks to fulfil children’s wider potential to contribute, achieve, and  
enjoy. Learning beyond narrowly defined academic achievement is a paramount aspiration for  
lifelong learning across diverse socio-cultural and educational contexts.

The multi-disciplinary links and a multiple outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM) can  
be daunting to educationalists whose recent agenda has been the delivery of quantifiable  
curriculum targets. The chapter investigates implementation of the policy through an arts-based  
approach; it uses ECM as a basis for creative education and holistic development for children and  
young people. It explains the theory and practice implicit in the wider objectives of ECM,  
exploring rationales, debates, and issues within the cultural connections agenda, as well as  
providing evidence to support practice in meeting the broader learning requirements. Using  
studies of successful cultural projects based on cross-agency and inter-disciplinary  
partnerships, it provides models of practice to facilitate an inclusive and creative approach to  
deliver ECM’s outcomes, accessible to any level, ability or setting.

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The 2004 Children Act and ECM policy document extend beyond purely educational concerns to  
embrace targets for holistic development for children and young people across a range of  
identifiable areas of need, both academic and social. Nevertheless, the policy espouses a  
commitment to education and other interventions involving networks of support in addressing  
problems of social deprivation.

An underlying assumption is that ‘educational achievement is the most effective route out of  
poverty’ (DCSF, 2007), a phrase occurring in the opening page of the ECM website and quoted  
extensively in follow-up national and local proposals. Interviewed in September 2007, in  
response to the Research Report produced by the Campaign to End Child Poverty, Schools
Minister Andrew Adonis confirmed that helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds through education was one of New Labour’s key objectives (BBC, 2007).

Research published in both ECM and by the Campaign to End Child Poverty (2007) indicates that the quality of the family environment and its relative security, in both economic and social terms, has the most significant impact on children’s development, well-being and achievement. It is useful, then, to consider the prominence given to the meeting of educational targets within the policy, an area which appears to take precedence in dissemination of the initiative. As Chapter 2 shows, national policy documents are informed by wider political discourses and agendas which inform both the language, structure and the proposed means of implementation of the initiative. Uniting previously discrete agencies through a shared responsibility for children’s welfare aims to improve the safety net for vulnerable children. The allocation of a pivotal role for education in meeting children and young people’s wider needs also increases the accountability of educational institutions in implementing government policy. This development could be regarded as having strategic implications for measurability of ECM’s policies: auditing the schools’ implementation of ECM is arguably more feasible than measuring social improvement through the family. It is also less expensive than economically bolstering needy groups in society.

The panoramic scope of ECM documentation with multi-agency involvement presents a challenge to educationalists. The chapter investigates the Cultural Connections dimension in relation to previous theoretical debates. It explores the potential for implementation in schools in partnership with other contributors such as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Arts Council and a range of cultural settings and practitioners.

THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The significance of the arts and leisure component of the policy has been developed in consultation with young people, who identified, "things to do and places to go" as their priorities (DCSF, 2007). DCFS targets seek improved access to culture, sport and play for young people, to facilitate participation and develop talents in culture and sport. The emphasis is on two key areas: ‘enjoying and achieving’ and ‘making a positive contribution’. There is a recognition that such activities have the potential to offer benefits which extend beyond those of the individual. They provide scope for addressing wider agendas such as promoting diversity, fostering creative partnerships between a range of trusts and agencies and enabling young people to participate in creative and inspiring activities within and beyond the school curriculum. The discovery that children are motivated by agendas other than the cerebral is not new within arts education: cultural educators have long campaigned for education to address needs beyond cognitive development. The significance of creative approaches, spearheaded by the arts, in meeting broader cultural needs is also a familiar rhetoric in educational initiatives. Sir Ken Robinson, influential writer and lecturer argued, in his presentation at the TED Conference, that ‘creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status’ (2006). This view endorses earlier findings from an extensive report, All our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education (Robinson, 1999) and correlates the development of creativity with the raising of cultural awareness. It recommends addressing the needs of society and the individual through a partnership model which is redolent of ECM’s Cultural Connections agenda. It demands government support for creative and cultural education and for training to enable teachers to ‘facilitate development of young people’s creative abilities and cultural understanding’ (p,12).
In his 2001 book *Out of Our Mind: Learning to be Creative*, Robinson suggests that creativity, like culture, is not an isolated individualist phenomenon:

Creativity can be inspired or stifled by cultural conditions. Understanding the culture of creativity is essential to being able to promote it in organizations and in nations (p. 167).

ECM’s message that cultural experience requires a holistic model of education has informed previous educational agendas and policies. The hierarchy of subjects, with privilege given to subject areas conventionally regarded as ‘academic’, is prevalent throughout the Western world. (See Chapter 13.) But it is contested, as Elliot Eisner (2002) suggests:

….literal language and quantification are not the only means through which human understanding is secured and represented (p. 204).

Recognition of domains of experience other than the cognitive is well established in the educational community. For example, Howard Gardner’s (1999) theory of multiple intelligences sees intelligence as multi-perspectival, rather than entirely logical-deductive. It incorporates traditional spectrums of intelligence such as mathematical and linguistic, as well as modes of engagement associated with the arts: visual and spatial, musical and kinaesthetic, with human consciousness: interpersonal, intrapersonal, spiritual and existential, and with the phenomenological world - naturalist. Gardner’s premise is widely respected as an influential theory, with some educational institutions acknowledging the impact of learning styles and intelligence orientation on its learners. However, no radical shift from the traditionally dominant subject hierarchical model of the curriculum has yet occurred and the more readily quantifiable modes of intelligence are still dominant.

The privileging of cognitive intelligences within Western culture and education reflects a society where achievement in these spheres garners respect, status and success. Gardner proposes a wider perspective, valuing cultures predicated on skills other than the mathematical-linguistic. For example, a rural tribal society relying on shared enterprise, spatial skills and physical stamina would foster contrasting modes of intelligence to its Western counterpart. Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl (2002) contends that some societies can favour the arts as their central mode of cognition and communication:

In many societies, including particularly some of those of the South Seas, children and young people learn the important elements and values of their own culture through musical experience (p. 31)

Yet there is still reluctance to offer such ‘non-academic’ areas of the curriculum the same importance awarded to the traditionally academic spheres. Such preferences reflect the underlying ethos of a society, indicative of its dominant ideologies, values and aspirations. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2002) observes:

Every human culture, by definition, contains meaning systems that can serve as the encompassing purpose by which individuals can order their goals (p. 218).
Such meaning systems are disseminated implicitly and explicitly throughout its entire cultural milieu; as Raymond Williams comments, ‘culture is ordinary’; it takes place in ‘the whole of life’ as well as in domains we associate with the notion of culture: ‘in institutions, and in arts and learning’ (1958, cited in Higgins 2001:11). Value ascribed to different forms of cultural production is variable, with a hierarchy frequently existing between that designated by society as ‘high art’ and more populist forms of cultural practice. Cultural institutions such as galleries, theatres and concert halls bestow value on artists’ production, establishing and reinforcing stratification of value by their patronage and support. Cultural theorists such as Williams have criticised the hierarchical approach to culture, its social divisiveness and perpetuating inequality of access and opportunity through:

…this extraordinary decision to call certain things culture and then separate them, as with a park wall, from ordinary people and ordinary work (1958, cited in Higgins 2001:13).

As the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) contends, the ability to operate across the spectrum of levels of cultural production, demonstrating a grasp of nuances of meaning and function, amounts to a valuable commodity which he calls ‘cultural capital’. While ownership of cultural capital may not convey monetary wealth, it does give ‘symbolic profit’ (p. 230), the acquisition of cultural knowledge and the corresponding level of social confidence and esteem.

Critical debates over the last three or four decades have challenged such cultural hierarchies. Postmodernists, such as Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, propose the notion of parallel or competing narratives which counter traditional paradigmatic structures. Challenges to colonialism, class and patriarchy, from such quarters as feminists, queer theory, post-colonialism and anti-globalisation activists, all conspire to rock the boat of cultural supremacy. Pluralist discourses present a breakdown of the adherence to past judgements on what constituted quality and value. An example is Jerry Springer - the Opera , a synthesis of popular television reality-show with the conventions of Wagnerian operatic performance.

Within this arena of cultural synthesis and celebration of difference, educationalists endeavour to acknowledge diversity of experiences and perspectives within the pluralist society which encompasses British life. The National Curriculum champions the importance of respecting and understanding cultural diversity. Yet a tension still exists in striving to balance the needs of antithetical cultural traditions. Nevertheless the curriculum seeks to reflect the melange of socio-cultural experiences which constitute British life and to recognise the diversity of expression and experience in a heterogeneous society. ECM’s outcomes espouse the target of equality for all young people to meet their full potential. To this end the educational system must develop cultural strategies to stimulate curiosity, appreciation and respect in celebrating our diversity of cultural idioms.

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS: INITIATIVES WITHIN AND BEYOND THE CURRICULUM

While ECM recognises that education must incorporate children’s wider needs, the existing National Curriculum Orders acknowledge the importance of learning extending beyond the boundaries of subject knowledge:
Education that develops cultural understanding and recognises diversity is crucial for the future well-being of our society (QCA, 2007).

The Curriculum from the Foundation phase through to completion of GCSE examinations at Key Stage 4 and post-16 is constantly under review. Restructuring of curriculum orders build on previous practice with continued commitment to addressing wider societal and cultural issues. Such aspects of education are currently addressed within non-statutory aspects of the Curriculum known as Cross-curriculum dimensions as well as through specific subjects, particularly the Arts and Humanities.

Cross-curriculum dimensions provide important unifying areas of learning that help young people make sense of the world and give education relevance and authenticity. They reflect the major ideas and challenges that face individuals and society (QCA, 2007).

Cross-curriculum dimensions addresses a broad spectrum of issues impacting upon the well-being of young people, encompassing aspects of their experiences as individuals as well as engaging with their role as citizens and contributing to a changing society. Topics include identity, cultural diversity, health, sustainability, critical thinking and citizenship. Some are highly contested with epistemologies regarded as antithetical to the government-validated pedagogy of the National Curriculum. (See Chapter 13.)

ECM places pressure on educational institutions to realise the existing agenda to support young people’s Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural needs (SMSC), along with additional responsibility for their physical, emotional and intellectual personal development. Schools are required to demonstrate the extent to which the curriculum contributes to meeting the five outcomes, addressing children and young people’s health, safety, achievement and enjoyment, their ability to contribute to society and their economic well-being. These are laudable aims, but are less easily measured than the statistical data of external examinations and Standard Assessment Tests results published in school league tables. The challenge lies with the Government to redress the balance in the priorities set for schools’ achievement, and to ensure that support is provided for schools to fulfil their social as well as their academic duty to pupils. Economic and socio-cultural factors are rightly regarded as providing no justification for failure to address the ECM outcomes. However, demands to meet increasing needs within socially deprived environments, place greater pressures on schools which are potentially demoralised by their inability to meet academic targets and successfully compete in league tables.

A number of initiatives have demonstrated an awareness of the role of creative and cultural activity in addressing both academic and wider educational needs in disadvantaged areas as well as across the whole educational sector. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) set up Creative Partnerships in 2002, managed by Arts Council of England. It was designed to provide opportunities for young people aged 5-18 years in deprived areas to develop their creativity and experience working in a collaborative mode with a range of partners. The initiative fostered partnerships between multi-disciplinary agencies: schools, individual arts practitioners, creative organisations and businesses. An Ofsted report commissioned by Culture Minister David Lammy, published in September 2006, confirmed the success of its approach. The culture Minister, David Lammy commented on its findings in an Arts Council’s press release:
When we set up Creative Partnerships in 2002 it was because we believed that the creative and cultural sectors have an essential role to play in exciting minds and enriching educational experiences. I’m delighted that the report published today supports this and that Ofsted found such good evidence that the programme was contributing to each of the Every Child Matters Outcomes (Arts Council, 2006).

Schools Minister Andrew Adonis, in the same press release, also praised the Creative Partnerships initiative, but places emphasis on its role in promoting achievement across academic aspects of learning. He reaffirms the traditional view of cultural and creative activity as of particular value when it contributes to the rest of the curriculum, rather than as a focus in its own right:

It is important that young people develop creative skills that can help them with their studies. Creative activities can also help to boost young people's self-confidence and motivation. I am pleased to see that the Creative Partnerships programme is encouraging pupils to enjoy learning and helping schools to improve pupils' achievement in literacy, numeracy and ICT (Arts Council, 2006).

Creative Partnerships are based in about thirty six areas of England, and projects so far have involved children in approximately one third of schools across the educational sector. The aim is not only to inspire young people to be innovative, risk-taking, adventurous and co-operative members of society, but also to rejuvenate teachers through productive and regenerative connections between educationalists, arts professionals and institutions. The Creative Partnerships (2007) website shows the range and scope of the many successful projects spanning diverse topics and issues. These range from the humanitarian focus of A Safe Place to Live, a citizenship project on diversity by photographer Rich Wiles, to Bel The Giant, using a Leicestershire myth as a starting point for imaginative performances and incorporating cross-cultural multidisciplinary arts. Breadth of vision and sensational outcomes confirm the Creative Partnerships mission statement that:

Creativity is not simply about doing the arts - it is about questioning, making connections, inventing and reinventing, about flexing the imaginative muscles (Creative Partnerships, 2007).

These processes cross disciplinary boundaries to foster creative collaborations. Creative partnerships can be formed either informally or through more formal coalitions supported by various local, national and private funding bodies. The success of these linked initiatives is indicated by further joint-funded projects such as the 2005 development, Cultural Hubs, involving arts organisations, galleries, museums and schools within focal areas. The project’s aims include the promotion of cultural activities among young people and the fostering of sustainable networks between schools and cultural sector organisations involved. A key factor is that cultural opportunities not only target young participants but also include continued professional development provision for staff within the educational sector. The Cultural Hubs baseline report, carried out in 2006 to investigate its potential, indicated a high level of positive expectations from future partners:
...(83% of schools, 78% of cultural organisations) expect parents, school governors and
the wider community to benefit from participation in the Cultural Hubs (Hayton

While the DCMS and Arts Council initiatives operate within specific regional areas, other
options are available to practitioners seeking connectivity between creative partners within their
own area in order to gain the educational benefits for young people. Davies, Howe and
Haywood’s (2004) research project ’Young Designers on Location,’ (YDoL) was funded by the
National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA). It fostered inventiveness
and imagination with groups of 11 year-old children through working partnerships with designers
in a supportive working environment in the South West and Midlands. They found that the
quality of the working location, in Harrington’s terms the ‘creative ecosystem’ (1990 cited in
Davies, Howe and Haywood 2004:278), influenced children’s responses. Case studies in the
research report indicated significant benefits to children participating in creative engagement at
this level. There is widespread recognition that generating such conditions within the school
system can be problematic due to ‘constraints of funding, curriculum, timetable and inspection
regime’ (Davies, Howe and Haywood, 2004:286). Out-of-school projects like YDoL, while not
fully viable within the mainstream curriculum, could be a means to combine ECM’s ‘extended
school’. The cultural connections agenda addresses the outcomes by extending times, beyond the
strictures of the timetable.

Schools which invest resources and curriculum time in implementing cultural activities report
high quality outcomes and follow-up impact. Such positive feedback has been generated in
response to the work of South West England’s arts-based action research organisation,
5x5x5=creativity. The organisation’s title is based on its inaugural project in 2000 when five
schools, each working in partnership with an artist and a cultural centre, generated artistic
outcomes which emerged from an exploratory child-centred methodology. Central to its
philosophy and practice is an investigative, process-based approach, informed by the Reggio
Emilia system of education. (See Chapter 15). Viewing the research process within art-making,
not as a preliminary element, but rather a central focus within children’s artistic development,
5x5x5=creativity projects foster valuable skills. As Mike Young, former Director of Education
for Bath and North East Somerset, suggests, ‘… creativity, flexibility and above all the ability
to think for yourself’ (5X5X5=creativity, 2007).

These desirable assets which, Young maintains, are essential for a changing world, are also the
skills which ECM seeks to promote through wider and enhanced learning opportunities. Cultural
projects have the potential to build the individual’s self-esteem while promoting human rights
through understanding and appreciating diversity. Such concepts are pivotal within ‘Global
Dimension’, the Development Education Association’s (DEA) pro-active internationalist guide
which ‘…emphasizes the positive contribution of diverse cultures and communities, locally and
globally (DEA, 2006:5).

ECM’s commitment to enable every child to reach full potential must be an anti-racist one as
prejudice destroys life’s possibilities. This is not just a priority for culturally diverse areas
because the need for education to counter limited cultural understandings is more important in a
monoculture. The Essex Intercultural Arts Project, based in an area with few minority ethnic
residents, sought to address misunderstanding and prejudice through a cross-arts intercultural
approach. The term ‘intercultural’ acknowledges the complex, mutable and hybrid nature of contemporary cultural identity. Working creatively with international artists across a range of disciplines and gaining respect for the dignity of individual’s beliefs and values, young participants were able to readjust their own personal paradigm and challenge previous preconceptions. Evaluations of the Project from teachers and External Examiner praised its impact on participants’ SMSC development:

...difference came to be seen by pupils as something to celebrate, and negative and stereotypical ideas as negative and destructive (Tallack, Knock, Stokes and Davison, 2004:74).

Addressing parallel issues of cultural diversity, the interdisciplinary arts project Scarves Reveal and Conceal, developed through a creative partnership between the present author and visual artist, writer Carol Cooke, a range of educational institutions, and the Study Gallery of Modern Art in Poole. Scarves Reveal & Conceal was a visual arts interactive installation funded by a range of agencies including the Arts Council. It was first exhibited at The Study Gallery of Modern Art in Poole, Dorset (2006 –2007). The installation explored and celebrated cultural diversity, through the role of the scarf as an individual and collective symbol of socio-cultural meaning and identity. It incorporated an extensive programme of interactive activities during both its developmental and exhibited stages, involving a wide cross-section of the community. While images of diversity can be celebrated for their societal enrichment, offering a multiplicity of possibilities and choices, anxiety around notions of ‘difference’ can create suspicion, confusion and even fear. Scarves Reveal & Conceal workshops and installation provided space to question pre-conceived ideas which can trigger prejudice, and challenge them through playful and experimental creative engagement. Images from both the exhibition and the workshops are available on the author’s web pages on Bath Spa University’s website. It is a resource which provides a continued focus for exploratory work on image and identity with a wide range of audiences (Bianchi, 2007) (http://users.bathspa.ac.uk/biaj1/).

The installation features four central mask casts from whose mouths flow ‘rivers of opinion’, a fabric maze printed with poetry, stories and narratives. Surrounding this central sculptural area, twelve images of scarf-wearing people from around the globe display the hijab, turban, headscarf, bandana, stole and invite the viewer to interact with the installation. Their faces are clear so the viewer, inserting their own face, sees the world for a short while, through another’s perspective. A post-16 student, attending an exhibition workshop in image and identity commented, ‘the exhibition made me rethink the way that I saw different cultures – it was thought-provoking and particularly relevant now’.

By operating on both cognitive and affective levels of the mind, the arts are capable of engendering change in a more powerful and direct form than logical-deductive modes which are frequently employed.

CONCLUSION

ECM’s cultural connections can be effectively met through a range of cultural strategies incorporating practice currently within the domain of the arts educational community. Moreover, fulfilment of ECM’s broad-based holistic agenda lies within the scope of arts specialist
practitioners who have expertise in addressing key issues of diversity, equity and personal development. ECM demands an inclusive approach with potential for building esteem and achievement across a wider subject profile than the narrow scope of the currently privileged, traditional academic subjects.

The challenge lies with the government and with educationalists to recognise the potential of cultural strategies in delivering many key issues within ECM. Current educational paradigms are predicated on notions of Western society as post-industrial and systems-based. Yet evidence suggests that the new global society is an organism in a state of creative flux, struggling to respond to challenges of an economic, environmental and cultural nature. New possibilities bring new tensions which are recognised within current educational legislation such as *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion* (DfES, 2007). This outlines schools’ duties and their role in promoting social harmony within a rapidly evolving, diverse society. While publication of such documents signals commitment to the wider issues impacting upon education, arguably teachers need strategies beyond the provision of further reading matter in order to address such aspects of the ECM agenda. If ECM is to be more than a formality then a paradigm shift is required: teachers need different skills to meet the needs of young people in their care.

**SUMMARY POINTS**

- The 2004 Children Act and the policy document *Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools* (DfES 2004) aim to address children’s wider potential to contribute, achieve, and enjoy, as well as providing for their academic development.
- Influential theorists such as Howard Gardner and Sir Ken Robinson suggest an approach which recognises a multiplicity of perspectives to intelligence and a correspondingly broader educational agenda.
- Cultural and creative partnerships provide a model for development of key areas of knowledge and skills.
- Arts education incorporates cultural strategies which have the potential to address a holistic educational remit and meet ECM’s *cultural connections* agenda.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What wider generic skills are identified within the ECM guidelines and across other new legislation mentioned within the chapter?
2. How can these be developed through a holistic approach to the curriculum?
3. What kind of cultural strategies have you observed in use, within a school or other educational institution, as a focus for the development of wider learning? Discuss and compare your findings with a learning partner who has visited another institution.
4. How can cultural institutions enhance delivery of ECM within the local community?
5. To what extent do creative partnerships between educational and cultural institutions, in your locality, extend provision of ECM?

**FURTHER READING**

A guide to issues of practice, pedagogy and policy within creative education, edited by a highly respected editorial team within the field of creativity.


A publication edited by three influential writers on holistic educational approaches, addressing pertinent perspectives and debates within contemporary education.


A range of strategies for developing children’s learning through arts education:


Internationally renowned educationalist, Elliot Eisner, investigates the role of the arts in developing children’s cognitive facilities.


A cogent argument for a more holistic approach to intelligence, recognising the significance of affective as well as intellectual processes in learning:

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This document was added to the Education-line database on 13 February