



Action for Children's Arts Round-Table

Young Vic Theatre, London

29 April 2016

Attendees

Action for Children's Arts (ACA)

David Wood OBE – Chair, ACA

Vicky Ireland MBE - Vice-Chair, ACA

Mimi Doulton, Development Assistant

School representatives

Jagdeep Birdi – Head teacher, Colville Primary School

Iain Erskine – Head teacher, Fulbridge Academy

Becky Lawrence – Deputy Head teacher, Hill Mead Primary School

Bronwen Morris – Assistant Head teacher, Granton Primary School

Katy Sechiari – Outreach Manager, The BRIT School

Emma Stiman – Arts leader and Music teacher, Colville Primary School

Arts practitioners

Chris Abbott – Emeritus Reader in Assistive Technologies, King's College London

Kerry Andrews – Artistic Director, Arts Depot

Adam Annand – Associate Director of Creative Learning, London Bubble Theatre

Laurence Alliston-Greiner – Co-artistic Director, Floods of Ink

Michael Bryher – Actor and Director, Dumbshow Theatre

Olivia Carruthers – Co-founder, Teach-It-Through-Drama

Kate Cross – Director, the Egg Theatre Bath

Ellie Douglas-Allen – Creative Producer, Random Dance

Adrienne Ferguson – Co-founder and Creative Director, TreePress

Kinny Gardner – Co-artistic Director, Crazy Kat Theatre

Georgiana Goldborne – Emergency Exit Arts

Tony Gouveia – Associate Director, Immediate Theatre

Elaine Grant – Head of Access Programmes, Mousetrap Theatre Projects

Catherine Greenwood – Learning Associate, Unicorn Theatre

Daniel Harrison – Young Vic, Taking Part

Pamela Jikiemi – Head of Participation, Theatre Peckham

Michael Judge – Associate Director, New International Encounter

Alex Kanefsky – Co-artistic Director, Paper Balloon

Kumiko Mendl – Co-founder, A Thousand Cranes

Jude Merrill – Director, Travelling Light Theatre

James Moore – Drama tutor, the Egg Theatre Bath

Sarah Schofield – School Programme Manager, Little Angel Theatre

Suzy Smith – Artistic Director, Theatre Peckham

Tina Williams – Artistic Director, Pied Piper Theatre



Apologies for absence

Holly Barradell – Drama Education Specialist
Hannah Cox – Education Manager, Southbank Centre
Sue East – Head teacher, St. Andrew’s CofE Primary School
Peter Glanville – Artistic Director, Polka Theatre
Nic Hoskins – Head of Junior School, Frensham Heights School
Holly Hunter – VoiceLab Manager, Southbank Centre
Jack Powell – Policy and Communications Officer, Cultural Industries Federation
Mark Powell – Artistic Director, Prime Theatre

“The arts are not separate at Fulbridge Academy, but **a vital part of everyday life.**”
Iain Erskine – Head teacher, Fulbridge Academy

“[Colville Primary School] has moved from the bottom 200 schools in the country to the top 200... **this success is entirely linked to the school’s arts involvement,** which makes economic as well as academic sense.”
Jagdeep Birdi and Emma Stiman – Colville Primary School

“In the National Curriculum it is statutory for schools to teach through the arts.”

“Our Outstanding Ofsted mark [July 2015] has showed the **impact of the arts on the achievement and progress of pupils.**”
Becky Lawrence – Deputy Head teacher Hill Mead Primary School

“**The emphasis on the arts has raised academic attainment.**”
Bronwen Morris – Assistant Head teacher, Granton Primary School

“Our ethos is to support them [students] to become **good citizens and happy and creative individuals.**”
Katy Sechiari – Performing Arts Teacher, the BRIT School

“**the common denominator in [Ofsted] Outstanding schools is arts provision as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.**”

Recommendations

Politicians need to be removed from education decision-making. Perhaps Multi-Academy-Trusts will make a more teacher-led curriculum possible.

Longer school days make it possible for schools to offer better arts provision.

Teachers need training to feel more confident with the arts. Recruiting teaching assistants and school governors with some positive arts experience can also remove the onus of arts education from core curriculum teachers.

ACA needs to engage selectively with Academy trusts – those who recognise the value of the arts... [we can] use them as a channel of communication.

Schools should open up a dialogue with arts organisations to help them create the right product for their students.

There is an overwhelming amount of information for teachers looking to collaborate with professional artists. Could a centralised web-resource be of use to both the artists and educators in the room?

Primary arts education can be improved through: parent and community engagement, partnerships and networking, and collaborative campaigning.

ACA Action points

Continue to work with attendees to develop the themes discussed.

Organisae a conference for practitioners to develop a plan of action.

Create a dossier of international best-practice regarding the place of play in children's lives, including supporting arguments from UK best-practice schools.

Further Thoughts

Do schools who think that the arts subjects are important speak up for their inclusion in the National Curriculum?

If it is thought that school time is wasted and money is not well invested in experiencing professional art, what is the counter-argument?

Can all arts be experienced through the medium of a screen?

If children learn best when they are interested, how can the arts help engagement?

Full minutes below

The event was introduced by ACA chair, **David Wood**. This round-table aimed to bring together children's arts practitioners with schools that prioritise the arts.

Vicky Ireland, Vice-Chair introduced ACA, which is currently working to draw up a list of best-practice primary schools. This resource will be drawn upon for advice and representation at arts advocacy events.

This was followed by presentations from the school representatives:

Iain Erskine – Head teacher, Fulbridge Academy

Fulbridge Academy is a Cambridge Primary Review Trust Alliance School, a Whole Education Partner and Pathfinder School and a National School of Creativity. It is in Peterborough, Cambridge – an area of high deprivation, and will soon welcome over 900 students of about 32 nationalities.

Fulbridge Academy prioritises a broad and balanced curriculum, with an emphasis on STEAM not STEM. The first specialist team to be introduced was a PE Team and this approach was then transferred to build an Arts and Creativity Team. Students from nursery through to year 6 receive specialist teaching in these areas from professionals who have an expertise in their subject area and also a passion for teaching. The Arts and Creativity Team is in school 5 days a week and bring their expertise and love for dance, drama, music and story-telling to the students.

The Academy has also prioritised raising the visual profile of the arts across the school. Corridors are a place for exhibiting students' work. Artists in residence are welcomed and the Academy boasts an art gallery and termly art exhibition. A new building has recently been constructed with a performing arts theme – all the classrooms are named after famous places, utility rooms are named after songs and there is a dance studio with full length mirrors and professional lighting equipment.

The arts are not separate at Fulbridge Academy, but a vital part of everyday life.

Jagdeep Birdi – Head teacher, Colville Primary School

Colville Primary School is on Portobello Road, in a deprived community where 59% of students are eligible for free school meals. Despite a constricted site, student numbers have double in numbers in recent years. When Jagdeep started at Colville Primary School, there were low academic standards, poor arts provision and lack of support from parents at school concerts and events. The governors and teachers decided it was time to create a new vision for the school, with the arts playing a central part.

Emma Stiman – Arts leader, Colville Primary School

Originally hired as a music teacher, Emma is now Arts Leader at Colville Primary School. When Colville Primary School first looked at getting an Artsmark Award,

they decided to employ a full-time art teacher alongside Emma. The Arts department has now expanded to include separate practitioners for each art form, and additional support for Emma in the music department. The Artsmark has helped Colville Primary School to see what areas of their arts provision can be celebrated and what still needs to be developed.

Students benefit from peripatetic dance, drama and film teachers, take part in an annual Shakespeare festival, design a float for the Notting Hill Carnival, put on a production in a public theatre every year and also get the opportunity to learn instruments. The improvement in arts provision has resulted in a 98% attendance rate from parents at concerts.

Colville Primary School has long-term relationships with the Saatchi Gallery, Royal College of Music, Royal College of Art, Royal Albert Hall, Chicken Shed and other donors. It has moved from the bottom 200 schools in the country to the top 200, and is now one of the top 20 education providers for deprived children. Jagdeep and Emma both believe that this success is entirely linked to the school's arts involvement, which makes economic as well as academic sense.

Kate Cross, on behalf of Sue East – St. Andrew's Primary School, Bath

St. Andrew's was part of a pilot programme with the Egg Theatre called 'School without Walls'. The idea was to host a primary school class at the Egg for 7 weeks – allowing students to go to the Egg instead of school every day. Thus, their learning environment became a cultural setting, a place at work and a city centre place and the Egg became a campus for learning.

The project demonstrated how standing back as a teacher and allowing oneself to follow a child's fascination was just as effective as previous teaching models. Although funding for the project ran out, Sue East managed to embed the School without Walls principles into year-round activity at St. Andrew's Primary School. Students frequently learn outside the school area alongside grown-ups and other people at work. The school uses local organisations, arts and cultural settings as a platform for learning.

Becky Lawrence – Deputy Head teacher, Hill Mead Primary School

When Ofsted visited Hillmead in July 2015 they awarded the school an Outstanding, with specific mention of the curriculum and the school's partnerships with theatres and arts organisations. In the National Curriculum it is statutory for schools to teach through the arts.

Hill Mead Primary School is in the centre of Brixton. 70% of students are from disadvantaged homes, so there is a high pupil premium. As a local resident of Brixton, Becky was well-connected with local artists and community workers, and used these contacts to build partnerships that are central to the curriculum. There is no curriculum map – each year starts with a blank piece of paper and instead the curriculum is inspired by experiences that act as stimuli for the children's learning. Partnerships with the Unicorn and the National Theatre allow

every year group to go to the theatre annually and create a project around what they have experienced. The vision of the school is that children will leave viewing theatre and cultural events as a normal part of life, rather than something that other people do.

Hill Mead Primary School builds real partnerships – it is not just interested in one-off theatre workshops, but making the arts an integral part of the curriculum. The Outstanding Ofsted mark has showed the impact of the arts on the achievement and progress of pupils. The Arts teach collaboration and communication, which are particularly important skills for this demographic of students.

Bronwen Morris – Assistant Head teacher, Granton Primary School

Over 50% of Granton Primary School pupils have English as an additional language. When the Head teacher changed a few years ago it was a chance to shake up the curriculum and change the issue of unmotivated children and disengaged parents. The new child-centred curriculum still draws on the National Curriculum but is based on student input. Student learning ambassadors from each class come to staff meetings to say what they want to learn and projects are created based on this. Although there is no specific arts focus, it is prioritised alongside PE and core subjects.

The emphasis on arts has raised academic attainment. Children are engaged in more active learning – for example a recent project was creating a fashion show, for which they chose music, choreographed a dance, created a film, designed prints and ran proceedings front of house and backstage.

Granton Primary School is partnered with the Southbank Centre, which has been a huge influence. Despite geographic separation, the Southbank has become an extension of the classroom, rather than a school trip destination. Students have enjoyed African drumming workshops, protest participation and visits from Rambert – all integrated in their curriculum. The school is keen to demonstrate to children that they are lucky to live in London, as not all children have the same immediate access to arts.

The school now has a supportive and engaged parent-base and has drawn strongly on this and community links since the Paris terror attacks in late 2015. These attacks have encouraged a re-think on drawing professional artists out of the local community rather than travelling further afield.

Katy Sechiari – Outreach Manager, the Brit School

Based in Croydon, the BRIT School was set up as first free performing arts school in the country, which was identified as a deprived area that lacks schools. It is state funded, and supported by the British Recording Industry Trust, whose events fund the school. Students are 14-19 and come for GCSE, A level and BTEC courses. The school has also recently introduced year 14 courses. There are 9 different departments including: music, theatre, dance, musical theatre, interactive media (games), film and media, community arts practice, technical theatre arts. Students

apply to the school and choose one course, which is their strand, but also have to do National Curriculum subjects.

The BRIT School has a longer day than most schools so that students can get a focus on the arts but still do their curriculum subjects. It is the first school to run community arts at post 16 level, supported by Central School of Speech and Drama. This course has opened up a new range of partners. Every student engages in a community arts project and the summer term is community arts term. These projects mix up students from different strands, allowing them to work with local rehabilitation organisations, schools for children with learning difficulties and other key figures in the community.

The BRIT School does not expect students to pursue the arts professionally. Its ethos is to support them to become good citizens and happy and creative individuals. There are no uniforms, bells or detentions. This results in excellent behaviour and students taking on more responsibility whilst enjoying creative independent study and contributing the neighbourhood in which they study.

Vicky Ireland opening the floor

This room holds the converted – however, lots of people do not know the argument for arts education or understand the problem. Our government does not seem to appreciate the place of the arts in education. What are its quantifiable outcomes? Our school representatives have stated the arts improve standards, so why are people not listening?

In recent years artists have witnessed real problems as schools neither go to arts organisations, or invite them in. Some have been persuaded that the arts take valuable time away from studies. How can this situation be balanced? If best-practice schools can do it, why can't others?

Response

Daniel Harrison to school representatives:

Have you faced any resistance from other staff members, particularly senior leadership, or parents? How did you combat that? Harris academies are a particularly strong example of where the leadership won't allow children to be taken to the theatre in case they miss core subject classes.

Iain Erskine:

Ofsted is an independent body that does good research. This research shows that the arts have an impact on standards, in fact the common denominator in Outstanding schools is arts provision as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.

Iain Erskine arrived at Fulbridge Academy 6 months after the school was declared Special status. He made his priority arts education and inspiring a love of learning.

Politicians need to be removed from education decision making, as the curriculum would be very different if teachers had more influence.

Vicky Ireland:

Can we make a collective voice pro-Arts education?

Jagdeep Birdi:

Schools have their own control over the curriculum. At Colville Primary School students have extended days to get access to everything they need in the curriculum. This means that they don't miss literacy lessons.

In response to Daniel Harrison:

Different multi-academy trusts will have different success in a new world of education. It is harder for schools deemed difficult to take on the arts as they are told that they cannot save the school whilst simultaneously having a good arts provision.

At Colville Primary School there is no expectation on normal teachers to provide Arts education, instead additional resources are used. Schools and Academies need to be persuaded to use their additional resources to create hubs of artistic excellence that can be transferred between schools. By creating a model that works, schools could have good arts provision without impacting on the core subjects.

Daniel Harrison:

Perhaps you should not get an Ofsted Outstanding without outstanding arts provision.

Emma Stiman in response to Daniel Harrison:

I did come up against some resistance – it was interesting process and as blockers witnessed the benefits first hand they become more open to the arts.

Jagdeep Birdi:

As a Gold Artsmark school we would welcome reluctant schools to come and visit us as a case study.

Emma Stiman:

Schools are under pressure from what the government expects. Key decision makers have not had positive experiences in the arts as children. This is what we are up against.

Adam Annand:

Artists also have a responsibility to understand the environment within schools. This morning we have heard how many of the artists used by schools are drawn from the teaching staff, parent body and support staff. As an industry we need take a more nuanced approach and try harder to fit in and engage – not just with the curriculum but with the constraints that teachers face.

Adam gave an example of a programme he has developed with Southwark schools that benefits both the children and the support staff.

Laurence Alliston-Greiner to school representatives:

Is there any issue with money? Even when things are offered free – and when they seemingly fit in with the curriculum – the schools still put up resistance.

Kate Cross:

But are we here to talk about whether schools are embracing the arts, or how schools should prop up the arts industry? Children's arts participation can usually be delivered in house, but many organisations here have a product they are passionate to bring children and share with them.

Tina Williams to school representatives:

Would teachers invite these companies to visit or is the priority that every student has violin lesson etc.?

Becky Lawrence in response to Tina Williams:

Artists should take advantage of the political landscape, not be afraid of it. For example, currently the government is worrying a lot about schools at seaside towns not performing well. What is the difference between schools in London and elsewhere? It is an access to the arts, in London the arts are on every school's doorstep. The concern outside of London is that children are not getting cultural experiences. As the arts community we should look at this situation and take advantage of it.

Kinny Gardner:

Perhaps the issue is not schools, but the teacher training colleges. Frequently there is an atmosphere instilled of hierarchy, and so the only companies that teachers will engage with are those at the higher end. These companies are more accessible as they have large education departments, whereas smaller companies act in a very isolated manner. We need to open up the discussion to teaching training and how teachers can go into schools with the right expectations.

Chris Abbott in response to Kinny Gardner:

Colleges stopped training teachers in the 1980s – now 80% of the PGCE is taught in schools. Student teachers are getting the right experiences, but only if they end up in good schools. We need to work harder to make sure that schools used in the PGCE have good arts provision.

Jagdeep Birdi in response to Tina Williams and Kinny Gardner:

At Colville primary school we engage with several companies. Olivia Carruthers (Teach-It-Through-Drama) kick-started our drama education programme, making the teaching staff feel more confident teaching this subject.

One of the school governors runs a dance company – Flying Gorillas – who also do work with the children. By being involved with one school the company has become involved with a lot of community projects.

At Colville they train their own teachers so they automatically become exposed to arts. They are also keen to hire people with specific arts experience.

Vicky Ireland to school representatives:

Why do so many schools have no relationship with arts? Is it down to individuals?

Jagdeep Birdi disagrees with this point.

Iain Erskine in response to Vicky Ireland:

Trusts and academies are now conducting teacher training. The pressure on teaching training is to focus on subjects that are tested and measured, so very little drama, dance etc. is covered. Perhaps multi-academy trusts are actually a glimmer of hope? If the trusts could be persuaded that it is important to embed the arts into the school culture there could be real progress made.

Chris Abbott in response to Iain Erskine:

ACA needs to engage selectively with Academy trusts – those who recognise the value of the arts. In the past ACA has engaged with local authorities. Now we need to reinvent that approach for Academy trusts. We have to find the one or two that recognise the importance of the arts and use them as a channel of communication at Academy events.

Kate Cross to school representatives:

Reiterating an earlier question: do the teachers present believe that if you learn the violin you also need to watch the best violin player playing etc.?

Emma Stiman in response to Kate Cross:

When I am deciding which organisations I would like to work with, I think about cost of product being delivered and what are the children going to gain. We can't take everything so it is a matter of value versus cost. We must consider what and whom is already in the school as a resource.

Kate Cross and Alex Kanefsky to school representatives:

How do you assess the value of a product to the child?

Jagdeep Birdi in response to Kate Cross and Alex Kanefsky:

Sometimes as a school you have to take a risk about who you engage with. However companies can burn bridges by putting on boring shows. It is important to remember when doing something for school that every penny is precious. However if the product is free we will welcome it as long as it is offered at the right time in the day.

James Moore to Jagdeep Birdi:

Did you open up a dialogue with the company that let you down and see if you could help them improve?

Jagdeep Birdi thought this was good advice.

James Moore:

Arts organisations want to give you what you need but often schools say a product is not what they want without articulating why. Do schools know what they want?

Iain Erskine in response to James Moore:

Remember that schools are under huge pressure to sort out English, reading, writing and Maths. Schools aren't philistines, they would like the arts but lack time.

The future is brighter with multi-Academy trusts as local authority were the biggest block in former curriculums – multi-Academy trusts will be more teacher-run.

Pamela Jikiemi:

The Cultural Learning Alliance found that some schools see cultural learning as more important for intervention than Maths and English. How can we promote this viewpoint that cultural learning is not a luxury? It seems that most schools want to improve learning outcomes before they engage with the arts.

Vicky Ireland:

People already know what the arts can do but aren't listening.

Tony Gouveia:

Taking the Harris academies as an example, how do you effect change and get on the radar?

Having built good relationship with secondary schools in Hackney by going to drama teacher meetings with the local authority, Tony finds that primary schools don't have same networking setup. However the schools that know Tony ask him to go and work with 'tricky' students as they recognise the effect of them participating in drama.

Vicky Ireland in response to Tony Gouveia:

How could this model be transferred to travelling companies with no base?

Kinny Gardner in response to Vicky Ireland:

Is there any space for these companies to continue existing?

Tony Gouveia in response to Vicky Ireland:

Could ACA help them plug into communities?

Bronwen Morris in response to Tony Gouveia:

Primary schools in Lambeth *do* have cluster groups and partner schools.

In the last few years many professional athletes have been invited to do cross-curricular work. They encourage children, parents and teachers to understand the skills that you might gain from sport and how they can be applied to the core curriculum. How are these athletes different from artists?

Kinny Gardner in response to Bronwen Morris:

We have a government more interested in sports than arts.

Michael Judge response:

We could discuss how to prove the value of the arts forever. Dynamic, flag-waving, arts-loving teachers are central – it is great to hear from them.

But what lies underneath their love?

- 1) Partnerships, the Artsmark, parent and community engagement. How can we maximise that and make it work to scale?
- 2) We need to campaign and connect with other campaigns going on such as Kids Will Be Kids. Parent power is also vital as the government have to listen to that.

- 3) It is important not to be isolated so we must network and seek funding. We can work to embrace schools outside London. There is an event at the Unicorn theatre on 24 June exploring this topic.

Daniel Harrison:

The best idea this morning has been speaking to those who run Academy chains and arranging to speak at larger Academy meetings. This is not something that ACA should do alone, they should instead join forces as Michael has suggested. Getting Ed Vaizey on side could help persuade more resistant politicians.

James Moore in response to Michael Judge:

We need to work with local schools so that a longer relationship is built. Working with communities and teachers is key and your product needs to be cheap or free if possible. We keep going back to building relationships but the climate is currently against it. Teachers have become more resistant in the last few years.

Catherine Greenwood in response to James Moore:

Money and time are key pressures. If you build close partnerships with one or two schools this enables a proper dialogue and a chance to create something that teachers trust. Even as a small company it pays to work with only a few schools.

Vicky Ireland:

In Denmark there is a festival where all the schools are invited to watch what theatre is available and they get to choose what plays they are going to hire.

Catherine Greenwood:

A lot of relationships are down to individual teachers.

Emma Stiman in response to Kate Cross:

“How do you assess the value of a product to the child?”

As an artist and freelancer myself it's not about “them” and “us”. It's about what is each product going to bring our children? I think like a child – what will inspire them? Speak to them? Touch a chord? The child is the priority, not the artist. We don't want talk from companies, we want engagement.

Adrienne Ferguson:

As a former teacher it was always overwhelming how much choice and information there is about theatre on offer. If there was a centralised hub for this information, would you use it? How do you currently search for work? What is the core information you need to facilitate a great search?

Jagdeep Birdi in response to Adrienne Ferguson:

Lots of things are helping to facilitate the arts. ACA could contact the Mayor's office as they are currently creating a London Curriculum – we need to make sure the arts are well-represented in that curriculum. As part of the new curriculum they may help to build a website with a directory of companies. A one-stop-shop would certainly help a new Head teacher who doesn't know what's available in London .

There is currently a government agenda asking schools to think about generating money. At Colville they generate ¼ million per year, through hiring the site out to companies who do community work but also offer something free to the students.

Schools also are under pressure to extend the school day, as that is where the government wants to see the arts taking place. Companies need to act wisely and deliver their product at the right time of day. They could generate an income for and create a relationship with schools. There is a need for products that will suit both the modern family life and the needs of the schools.

Emma Stiman in response to Adrienne Ferguson:

If such a website existed I would check it regularly. It would need to include contact details.

Elaine Grant in response to Jagdeep Birdi:

What about the children who come to school and leave at 3.30pm? Would they get access to the arts as they edge towards extended hours? I have seen the number of schools applying to Mousetrap drop but young people are inspired by live work.

Suzy Smith in response to Adrienne Ferguson:

Creative Islington set up a website as a pilot like what we have discussed. Only arts organisations and teachers who were already engaged with the arts used it.

The London Schools Arts Service was also raised as an example.

Final question from Kate Cross to school representatives:

Could parent-teacher-alliances contribute more money towards school art provision? There doesn't seem to be much acumen around PTA fundraising.

At this point Vicky Ireland closed the discussion and thanked everyone for their ideas and contributions. Some clear action points have been taken from the day.