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Course: BA Illustration

Word Count: 2515

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Key words: Creativity, Development, Education

Proposed question for Independent Inquiry: What is the importance of art and design education for our society's cultural development?

I have chosen the theme of 'art and design's place within education'. Throughout this proposal, I will be exploring this theme in relation to three key words:

'Creativity', 'Development' and 'Education', discussing what these words mean in a classroom setting and how are they currently forming part of the learning environment and being implemented by teachers during lesson planning and delivery. In order to investigate why they are important and what can they offer I will seek advice from the current syllabus and explore the following:

- Children's development, how the school system has progressed or regressed?
- Is the current school system failing children when it comes to the arts?

In order to aid my research, I will be looking at key artists such as Grayson Perry and Rob Biddulph and key thinkers such as Dr Richard Jolley and Professor Dai Smith. I have chosen this topic because I am interested in art and design education as I plan in future to complete a PGCE in secondary art and design education. I think that this proposal and the dissertation that follows on from this will enable me to gain a key insight into how the current guidelines and syllabus recommends teaching art and design and how it places the importance of the arts subjects within education. This will allow me to be more aware of the way I teach in future, creating interesting and engaging lesson plans and workshops to become the best teacher that I can be.

"The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious – the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science" (The World as I see It, Albert Einstein, 1935)

Creativity

"Creativity is critical thinking and without it how are you going to open up and ask harder questions? Art opens up those... possibilities to think beyond what we already know." (Tate, Catherine Opie, 2018)

As an abstract noun, creativity describes the abundance of skill and passion someone has in relation to art and design processes. The dictionary definition for 'Creativity' is *"The use of imagination or original ideas to create something; inventiveness." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010)*

It is important to consider whether creativity is as highly valued in education as subjects such as maths or science or if it seen as a much less important subject.

Most young children and toddlers love picking up a pencil or crayon and drawing or colouring, so why is this natural passion for creating then lost by so many children once they reach the age of learning and being taught art and design in schools.

"Discredited by the academic brain of the intellectual, the skill of creativity seems to have lost its importance and worth in the hierarchy of ability that society has created." (Independent, Grace Fearon, 2015)

As children get older, they become more aware of criticism and some children may start to feel they are not good enough or that they simply cannot draw. Not creating art that is as realistically accurate as peers, as celebrated as peers, because they have made something different. Some children may be more naturally talented in technique realism than others, leaving some of their peers to not be recognised for creative efforts and encouraged by their teachers. This in turn can result in a lack of confidence and embarrassment over their art and as they grow older this may lead to a refusal to practice art. They no longer have a passion to create. This means that only the naturally talented children will go on to enjoy and study art and design and many other children will not get the opportunity to be creative or practice their skills.

Artists such as Grayson Perry want to change this idea. Perry believes that everyone is capable of creativity and he strives to make art accessible for everyone of all backgrounds. It is so important that everyone has the chance to be creative, even if they cannot achieve realism in their creations, there is much more to art and creativity than simply drawing pictures and people should have access to a range of resources from early childhood.

"anybody can enjoy art and anybody can have a life in the arts" (Reith Lectures, Grayson Perry 2013)



Figure 1 – Grayson Perry

I would like to explore why is creativity considered unimportant in a society where it is so prevalent. If you look around, everything has been designed. Art is everywhere. Illustrations on posters, magazines, fabric prints, homeware. Clothing. So why is it that art is viewed as a non-intellectual subject and why are artists often mocked at school for being passionate about their craft and talent? Told that their talent will not make them money or get them a job? I would like to further explore why art is often an undervalued degree.

"Creativity is essential to the success and fulfilment of young people, to the vitality of our communities and to the long-term health of the economy... I define creativity as the process of having original ideas that have value... There are various myths about creativity. One is that only special people are creative; another is that creativity is just about the arts; a third is that it's all to do with uninhibited 'self-expression'. None of these is true. On the contrary, everyone has creative capacities; creativity is possible in whatever you do, and it can require great discipline and many different skills" (Arts in Education in the Schools of Wales, Sir Ken Robinson, 2013)

Employers are often keen to recruit people who are creative, who seek out new ways to complete tasks. Why aren't schools therefore encouraging all aspects of creativity within learning throughout a wide range of subjects?

"Art in schools shouldn't be sidelined... it should be right there right up in the front because I think art teaches you to deal with the world around you. It is the oxygen that makes all the other subjects breathe" (Tate, Alan Parker, 2018)

Development

"The process of developing or being developed" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010)

"Creativity can also help with wellbeing and improving health and happiness – many students in the TALE study commented that arts lessons acted as an outlet for releasing the pressures of studying as well as those of everyday life." (Tate, Talking Point, 2018)

Art and design is important for development and mental health in general. It allows children to express themselves. Many adults turn to creativity as a way to combat depression or anxiety. Art plays an important role in the wellbeing of children and their development and all children and teenagers should be given the opportunity to create.

"Studying the arts teaches determination and resilience – qualities useful to any career. It teaches us that it is okay to fail, to not get things totally right the first time and to have the courage to start again." (Tate, 2018)

Dr Richard Jolley's article on AQA about all the benefits of art within education, enabling children to build vital skills such as Expression, Observational skill and problem solving.

Art is important for development in young children, it helps to build confidence. The ability for a child to determine what his or her picture constitutes, and nobody can tell them it is wrong because their picture belongs to them. This allows children to express their ideas and feelings freely, without fear of being incorrect.



Figure 2 - A 'bird' drawing made by a girl aged 2½ years.

As children become older, they start to create art based on observational skill, they are able to practise drawing by looking at the world around them in detail and reproducing it as art. *"Pictures encourage us to think about and understand the world visually"* (AQA, Dr Richard Jolley, 2013) Visual thinking is a skill a child is able to build when creating, which can then be applied to a wide range of subjects and professions.

"Although we still need more research to test these claims, we know that areas within the right hemisphere of the brain are the primary seat for processing and

developing the learning gained through participation in art activities... art education teaches a specific set of thinking skills not adequately addressed elsewhere in the curriculum. Children need a broad education that includes the arts, and the continued development of our society depends upon a creative education." (AQA, Dr Richard Jolley, 2013)

There are also cultural development benefits from studying art. *"Students from low-income families who take part in arts activities at school are three times more likely to take a degree"* (Tate, Talking Point, 2018). Art is helping to give opportunities to underprivileged young people, allowing them to attend university and obtain higher skill level. More people being able to study at university can also benefit the economy as they bring innovation, creativity and problem solving skills to their future careers.

Studying art offers a range of opportunities for children to develop personally. when working with others; viewing and critiquing peers work can encourage empathy and appreciation of others and their viewpoint. Art encourages pupils to view the world around them differently and start to understand how their peers may view the world, as everyone is different and comes from different circumstances and cultural backgrounds.

"Research and studies from the UK and Ireland highlight the vital role of culture and creativity in providing a more rounded overall education that develops creative and entrepreneurial qualities, confidence and wider skill sets in the learner" (Arts in Education in the Schools of Wales, Prof. Dai Smith, 2013)

Education

"The process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010)

Primary teachers especially are struggling to teach art as they are not specialised. They are failing to inspire the children.

"We are on the brink of deskilling our students on a massive scale... I can see from the work I do in my school that the arts are a lifeline." (Royal Academy, Andria Zafirakou, 2019)

Currently there is a concern surrounding how can art continue at home; I would like to research what the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic home-schooling on studying art. If parents do not view art as an important subject, will children get the chance to study art at home? Many artists have set up lockdown art lessons such as Grayson Perry, educating at home and Rob Biddulph lessons 'draw with rob', which has proven popular with children and their parents across the UK. Art is something that parents and children are able to enjoy together, a welcome break from trying to learn maths for example. It can offer an escapism from the stresses that currently surround our lives during the pandemic.

Are schools failing children and teenagers in the arts and the way they deliver the subject? What changes are currently being made by the government and teaching staff to combat this?

"STEAM activity designedly presents learners with unpredictable challenges that test their application of knowledge and understanding, rather than their ability to replicate or regurgitate it." (Tate, Prof. Stephen Heppell, 2019)

Primary schools often set aside art classes in favour of core subjects such as maths. This is having a detrimental effect on the arts as a whole and the development of creative skill in children. Art lessons are taught on average less than once a week at schools, with teachers replacing them with extra reading and writing lessons, in a panic to reach the high standards required for when the children sit their SAT tests.

The British government is currently trying to change the way it delivers art subjects to children across the UK, but many primary school teachers are not specialised in the arts and are unequipped or lack the confidence and skill to plan and deliver quality art lessons. This paired with the lack of resources and funding leaves children uninspired as the lesson will not be stimulating or allow children to explore their creativity freely in a range of media.

Funding for art in schools was cut, leaving a lack of resources available for pupils. Poor resources such as pencils, clay etc damaged the quality and experience of art for many pupils. Art teachers are often left to fund basic equipment themselves or rely on arts charities for donations.

"The Arts have the potential to capture a young person's imagination and unleash their creativity. I want all learners across Wales, regardless of their background or personal circumstances, to have access to high quality arts and creative experiences"
(*Arts in Education in the Schools of Wales*, Prof. Dai Smith, 2013)

Professor Dai Smith published his independent research, 'Arts in Education in the Schools of Wales' in 2013 and the Welsh government agreed to all twelve of his recommendations, which included suggestions such as integrating creativity within core subjects such as maths in order to enrich children's learning and field trips to art galleries for example.

Steve McQueen, artist/director calls for more funding for arts in public schools.

"Private schools place a premium on a rich cultural education for their pupils whilst many state schools are starved of the resources to support access to culture and creativity for their pupils. We need a level cultural playing field for all children because we want and need visually literate adults." (The Guardian, Maria Balshaw, 2019)

Educational schemes and arts charities, such as 'Nawr Cymru' provide training resources and funding for public schools that are otherwise struggling to gain artistic resources for their students or afford field trips to galleries to learn about the history of art.



Figure 3 – Arts council of Wales, Lead Creative schools' workshop.

Conclusion

After having made an initial case for why creativity is so important in our lives, particularly in regard to our mental health and well-being and how we develop throughout childhood, It is clear from my research that the current education system is failing society. In my Independent Inquiry, I will go on to explore this in more detail, making the case for a re-evaluation of the system, as it is clear that children (particularly those that are working-class) are being short-changed in this regard and missing out on high quality art lessons. I will further explore the implications of this for society as a whole. My question for my Independent Inquiry will be:

- What is the importance of art and design education for our society's cultural development?

Within my Independent Inquiry, I plan to also fully explore the psychology behind arts within education in order to answer my question in as much depth as possible because the psychology behind how art and creativity can help young children develop is a particular interest for myself. I have compiled a list of resources that will be able to assist me when writing my dissertation. Furthermore, I have also put together a list of sub-questions that I hope to explore within my Independent Inquiry next year:

- What are the benefits of being creative for children and teenagers?
- How does art aid early childhood development?
- How can art and design teaching be improved within schools?

- Is art undervalued by society?

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Figure 2 - Children and Pictures: Drawing and Understanding, Richard P Jolley, 2009, Wiley-Blackwell

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