

Complete manuscript of five blog posts, written for the Council of Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) published August 2023–January 2024. ©Vanessa Corby, York St John University and CHEAD.

1. "'I'm good at art, but stupid" the state of art and design education in the 21st Century', 15 August, 2023. Word count: 790.
2. 'The State and art & design education in England: Part One, 'Rip-Off Degrees', the poverty of expectations for the discipline and neoliberalism', 19 September, 2023. Word Count: 924.
3. 'The State and art & design education in England: Part Two, appreciation and the National Curriculum', 2nd October, 2023. Word Count: 1103.
4. 'The State and art & design education in England: Part Three, exclusion past, present and future' January 2024. Word count: 1404.
5. 'A state of the art creative education? Place-based learning and making, inclusivity and innovation' January 2024. Word count: 1462.

Total word count: 5683.

1. 'I'm good at art, but stupid': the state of art and design education in the 21st century

'I'm good at art, but stupid'. These words have haunted me since I first heard them last year, during a workshop entitled *Draw Hope* hosted by Barnsley Museums and Heritage Trust. The project is a wellbeing initiative devised for vulnerable young people referred by the NHS Social Prescribing Service. I'd been involved in a pilot that had informed it and was dropping in on their Saturday morning sessions to help the Trust's funding evaluation. In the introductions the youngest person in the room looked me in the eye and with deadpan wit, summed up their 12-year-old self as 'good at art, but stupid'. Twelve months on I still find it difficult to find the words to articulate how profoundly that enunciation angered and saddened me. Not least of all because, to everyone else present this matter-of-fact nature declaration seemed like a *normal* thing to say. We folk from Yorkshire do pride ourselves on a reputation for straight talking, but their frankness was going some even by our standards. How is it possible that someone so young can seem to be so certain of their own lack of intelligence? And, how can they be so assured, aged twelve, that having a gift for art isn't a marker of intelligence?

What this statement didn't do was surprise me, because in it I see a microcosm of the state of the English education today. 'I'm good at art, but stupid' is a judgement that testifies to the feeling of 'individual lack', embedded by the 'internalisation' of class inequality and systematic discrimination within UK education (Reay, 2017). Or, as Miranda Fricker would argue, to the weight of a 'deficit of credibility' due to the 'identity prejudice that tracks [people] through different dimensions of social activity – economic, educational, professional, sexual, legal, religious, political and so' (Fricker 2007). Education is not merely a matter of implementing policy and curriculum but is profoundly relational (Reay 2017; Ingold 2018), and it wasn't lost on me that, in the eyes of this young person, I was the posh professor who'd breezed back into her hometown to inspect the guinea pigs. Not so long before, as my train was coming into Barnsley station, a man dressed in a grey tailored suit turned to me and with clear disdain said, 'You in this hell too?' His smirk suggested he expected the concurrence of someone like him, someone who didn't belong *there*. The response he received wasn't quite what he bargained for. As Reay argued so powerfully, young people from poor and working-class communities live in constant fear of the 'shame and humiliation of being thought of as stupid' (2017). To this young person, the contempt of

an educated Barnsley expat was inevitable. They therefore took steps to deflect my power to pass judgement on them by beating me to it and put themselves down first.

'I'm good at art, but stupid' is a testimony to the symbolic violence of performance culture, whose drive for league table results has generated what Diane Reay has named a 'form of social apartheid'; a 'segregated system where different social classes are largely educated apart rather than together' (2017). The system's dependence on measurable outcomes, captured via the rapid regurgitation of rote learned facts and figures privilege the neurotypical, and those who have grown up with access to the cultural capital it legitimates. In 2022 Michaëlsson, Yuan and colleagues confirmed the link between low socioeconomic status (SES) and the greater incidence of ADHD, but their findings unequivocally rejected the presupposition of a relationship between this condition and lack of intelligence. What this young person's self-assessment articulates is the synergy between the effects of what Teresa Crew called the 'poverty of expectations' for the educational outcomes of the working class (2020), and what I would call the poverty of expectations for the disciplines of art and design. Young people who don't readily meet the requirements of performance culture find solace in and are steered towards the not so easily measured *non-academic* subjects of art and design, it's as simple as that (Uboldi, 2017; Corby, 2023).

I have taught fine art and art history in Higher Education for more than twenty years, working with many students from poor and working-class communities. That experience has taught me that UK universities are picking up the pieces of an ideologically driven education system, which discriminates against low socioeconomic status and actively undermines the contribution that art and design make to knowledge, society, and the economy. We are working within a system that teaches young people to write themselves and art off. This can't go on, and I'm taking this young person's damning self-assessment as the starting point for a call for a revision of the National Curriculum for Art and Design.

2. The State and art & design education in England: Part One, 'Rip-Off Degrees', the poverty of expectations for the discipline and neoliberalism

When I say there is a poverty of expectations for art and design educational outcomes in this country, I'm not saying anything that the discipline doesn't already know. The present impoverishment of the National Curriculum and its effects were foretold in Bob and Roberta Smith's *Letter to Michael Gove MP, 25 January 2011*. After the publication of the Government White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) the artist made an appeal to the Secretary of State for Education to 'rethink the role of creativity in society and realize innovation comes from optimism creativity risk taking and art'. It fell on deaf ears, however, and in July 2023 the British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak took the latest in a long line of cheap swings at 'rip-off degrees' on Twitter (now X). As the Sector knows 'Mickey Mouse', 'Harry Potter' or 'Rip-Off' degrees are pretty much a euphemism for any qualification that's not from what the Government deems to be a *proper* university and/or a creative subject. The fact that the Prime Minister's press office felt the need to rely on graphic representation to hammer home his message (fig.1), in all probability an image crafted by a designer with a rip-off degree, is positively poetic.

It's all too easy to proceed to a story of woe about how misunderstood the discipline is, how we too suffer from a 'deficit of credibility' (Fricker, 2007). As Catherine Soussloff (1990), Robert Hewison (2014) and Oli Mould (2018) have all argued society's present misunderstanding of 'creativity' has been centuries in the making, a point I'll come back to later. But part of my motivation for writing these blogs is that it's about time the sector took a long hard look at itself to consider what makes us so susceptible to attacks like Sunak's, so that we are better placed to defend the discipline and fight for the kind of education that young people deserve and need. Smith affirmed the need for optimism, a hope that to my way of thinking comes from the knowledge that art and design, at their core, are vehicles for social change. That capacity for social change was worth fighting for in 2011, but now I'd say fighting for it is a matter of the utmost urgency.

It is Summer 2023, and the Prime Minister thinks the English education system is broken. It is, just not in a way he's able or willing to acknowledge. As Stephen J. Ball argued nurseries, primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities are compelled to perform like businesses contrary to the non-profit nature of their products; educated children, young people, and mature students (2017). Institutional profit, or just a balance sheet in the black

is secured by an endless tranche of savings on essential services, staffing and resources. Success or failure in this competitive marketplace is a matter of institutional responsibility, just as the values of entrepreneurship and resilient self-interest that shape educational policy are devised solely to produce profitable individuals who will work in the service of the Nation's economic growth. If this neoliberal model of education doesn't sound broken, I refer readers to the 'perfect storm' of chronic teacher shortages (Gould, 2023) that numbered 7,500 in the UK in June (Mitchell, 2023), and the 55% of current teachers who have actively sought to change or leave their current jobs due to an overwhelming workload and its impact on their mental health (Education Support, 2022); the 60% of UK academics aiming to quit HE in the next five years for the same reason (UCU, 2022), and the staggering 57% of students reporting a mental health issues (Lewis and Bolton, 2023).

Sunak's 'rip-off degrees' graphic leaves the viewer in no doubt that fulfilling the Government's ambition to 'Grow the Economy' entails smashing universities who stand as an obstacle to the Nation's interests. I read this polemical strategy through Herbert Read's last call for the country to reject a centralised, national education system, which is aptly titled *The Redemption of the Robot* (1970). Read drew on the writing of political philosopher William Godwin, who writing in 1797 cautioned that any national system of education would become inevitably aligned with the interests 'national government',

'Government will not fail to employ [education] to strengthen its hands and perpetuate its institutions [...] their views as institutors of a system of education will not fail to be analogous to their views on the political capacity: the data upon which their conduct as statesmen is vindicated will be the data upon which their instructions are founded'.

With astounding acuity Godwin articulates an ideological loop, which illuminates how the present neoliberal government measures success on its own terms and blames individuals and institutions for its failure to safeguard education against the structural inequalities to which it is wilfully blind. Read and Godwin remind us, however, that the denigration and precarity of the disciplines of art and design are the result of the actions and ideas of more than one man, one government or one political party. Michael Gove wasn't so much the dastardly architect of English education's downfall, but the inheritor of a work in progress that had been supported by successive Conservative and Labour Governments over the course of more than twenty years. If we hold any hope of creating a more fit for purpose and inclusive system of art and design education, the Sector needs to address the complex,

but surprisingly very happy marriage between the National Curriculum, neoliberal ideology, the Creative and Cultural Industries and the rhetoric of social mobility.

3. The State and art & design education in England: Part Two, appreciation and the National Curriculum

In England the National Curriculum for Art and Design from Key Stage 1 to 3 (ages four to fourteen) hinges on the 'appreciation of great artists and designers' (DfE, 2010; 2013). This pedagogical focus is consistent with what Herbert Read called the 'common assumption' that developing an appreciation for culture is a positive, transformative force whereby ordinary people learn the 'language of the strange country' of art and 'gradually lift' themselves 'on to the cultural level' (Read, 1941). Read, writing in 1941, knew that this common assumption was 'fundamentally wrong, and fundamentally undemocratic'. Just as Diane Reay, speaking in 2019, blasted Ofsted's new 'authoritarian and elitist' emphasis on the acquisition of cultural capital as an act of middle-class acculturation (Guardian, 2019). What Read and Reay both comprehend is that appreciation doesn't secure the veneration of the arts in British society. Rather it is a key instrument in the poverty of aspirations for the discipline because it tells most people in this country that art and design are not for them, that their culture isn't good enough.

The educational requirements for art and design Key Stage 1-3 continue to be set out in accordance with this common assumption however. In a document numbering fewer than two full pages, appreciation forms the critical framework that views creative outcomes as product of the 'ideas' and artistic 'intentions' of creative individuals, made legible by their categorisation within a seemingly aesthetically coherent succession of canonical styles and movements. At GCSE and A Level, the curricula for art and design ask students to take risks and demonstrate competence in the handling of materials, but Key Stage 1-3 does nothing to facilitate the development of those skills. As John Steers pointed out, the scant treatment of art education in the Coalition Government's *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) made 'no reference to practical creative activities' (2014).

The cluster of bullets points that the National Curriculum puts forward as a guide to ten years of learning in art and design do not merit comparison with the seven pages it allots to history Key Stage 1-4, or, if you really want to be depressed, the forty-seven pages of detailed guidance for science. The absence of any substantive content on those (almost)

two pages has nothing to do with the deficiencies of art and design as a subject and everything to do with the paucity of disciplinary understanding in education policy. In 1991, a Working Party chaired by archaeologist Colin Renfrew, responded to the first iteration of the National Curriculum for Art and Design in 1988 by recommending that the teaching and assessment of the discipline should give precedence to its 'creative and practical elements' via processes of 'investigating, making, and understanding' (Burlington Magazine, 1992). These excellent suggestions were watered down by the National Curriculum Council, under the guidance of the then Secretary of State for Education, who placed 'a much greater emphasis on the historical and chronological study of art' to facilitate "'curriculum coherence and manageability'" and the development of an appraisable core of knowledge' (Burlington Magazine, 1992). Under the auspices of art appreciation, the education system has assimilated the study of art and design within performance culture's programme of rote learning. This false step removes art and design from their capacity to enrich and make sense of the world we live in. It misses the fundamental point that making is a thought process, driven by material challenges, situations and uses, not ideas figured at the level of the abstract in pursuit of greatness. As such the National Curriculum is blind to both art and design's imperatives and their means of achieving original, innovative insights and outcomes. Appreciation is ultimately a profoundly reductive means of engaging with art and design that has not only constrained the potential of pupils and teachers, but effectively rendered the subject meaningless and socially redundant, legitimating its exclusion from Key Stage 4 in the 2015 Strengthened English Baccalaureate.

Young people coming through this curriculum are woefully unprepared for the challenges and realities of making work both at university and in the creative industries. As my twenty-third Semester One gets underway, the rhetoric of appreciation ensures that most of my new students have begun university equipped with a disciplinary understanding they might as well have gleaned from a coffee table book. The notion that pre-formed ideas and intentions are the driver of the creative process is an incredibly seductive obstacle to their learning, built on historical misconception. Its power hails from the agency that its biographical narratives ascribe to individuals, a historiographical methodology that shaped the birth of art history in 16th Century Renaissance Florence (Sousloff, 1990). In the late 1800s the triumphs of the great artist (great man) became the cornerstone of the meritocratic ideology that invested new citizens of the French Republic in the wealth of the

nation state put on display in the newly instituted Louvre Museum, a move emulated in the formation of the National Gallery, London (Duncan and Wallach, 1980; Arnold, 1995). Hot on the heels of nineteenth century Romanticism's celebration of the noble sensibility of the artist, which supposedly set them apart from the concerns of ordinary people, the twentieth century mobilised the artist as hero/anti-hero as the antidote to the alienation of the atomic and industrial age, and the totalitarianism of the USSR (Rosenberg, 1972; Read, 1970 & 1970 [1966]; Orton and Pollock, 1996). This mythology retains its popularity today because it preserves the hope of individual agency and difference in a culture that is increasing homogeneous, just as the key to the power of neoliberalism lies in its promise of freedom which, as Chomsky argued, veils humanity's increasing servitude to global corporate interests (1999).

The history and criticism of art and design has spent the last fifty years steadfastly distancing creative practice from reductive biographical explanation, styles, and movements. Contrary to the standards of the discipline, however, the rise of neoliberal economic government policy, to refer again to Godwin and the happy marriage I intimated earlier, has ensured that the appreciation of self-determining, self-interested, entrepreneurial 'creatives' has become the foundation of contemporary art and design education. Since the 1990s the study of art and design has been a task of mining the work of past 'greats' in the unthinking pursuit of aesthetic novelty and short-term profit. In the twenty-first century the self-perpetuating algorithms of AI can do that. It is time that education policy crafted a National Curriculum for art and design that is worthy of the discipline, the young people who study it, and the society to which it should belong. And that will take more than two pages.

4. 'The State and art & design education in England: Part Three, exclusion past, present and future' January 2024.

While scratching my head about how to bring these blog posts to a close I kept coming back to an important exchange with a new student last year. At YSJU our Level 4 contextual studies curriculum asks students to question their perception of art and artists, drawing on seminar readings that perceive practice as a means of making sense of self and world, a vehicle for political critique and social change. 'But Vanessa', my new student countered 'outside these walls nobody cares about art'. I imagine, perhaps unjustly (but I doubt it), that this opinion is an affront to the gatekeepers of Higher Education who never tire of deriding students today because *they* don't know anything. Or, if the listener's baseline expectations are more kindly disposed, that it's sadly indicative of a lack of cultural capital, an ignorance of the discourses that speak to the complexity, diversity, and global significance of the discipline, which their education, in time, will fix. In other words, it's not us it's him.

To my way of thinking however, it is precisely because this student, let's call him Jack, was not yet immersed in the narratives that fuel the discipline's sense of self-importance that we need to listen to him. In only the third week of his degree Jack saw the gap between his curriculum and the 'deficit of credibility' under which creative subjects labour (Fricker, 2007). He didn't articulate it in Fricker's terms, he didn't need to, his astute insight was born of a world in which art has no place, where his love of his subject and hopes for the future are unfathomable. The task which faces creative Higher Education, and the creative sector is, as I said in the first post, to take a long hard look at this gap, at the systematic discrimination at work in our discipline, and how these exclusions make it culpable in its own cultural, economic, educational and social precarity.

In 2023 a longitudinal study was published in the journal *Sociology* that analysed fifty-years of creative occupation employment data from the Office of National Statistics (Brook et al). Its aim was to question the commonly held perception that the want of inclusivity in the creative sector is a relatively new phenomenon, which stands in contrast to a heyday of 'openness' in the arts in the 60s, 70s and 80s. Their analysis found that the odds of employment for graduates from the most affluent backgrounds was double that of a peer from the working-class. Perhaps more shockingly, though not surprisingly, they also found that compared to people who were working-class and/or from ethnic minorities and/or

women, a person was still ‘three times’ more likely to have a job in the creative occupations if they were male, came from an affluent background, lived in London, and yet *didn’t* have a degree (2023: 801). The systemic inequality of the creative sector is not, they argue, a recent development but endemic. Contrary to the belief that the arts were once a haven of meritocracy, they argue that opportunity for creative work is and always has been ‘profoundly unequal in class terms’ and that ‘gender and ethnicity compound inequalities of access to the cultural sector’ (2023:802).

This research is a game changer for the creative sector in two crucial ways. First, in no uncertain terms, it reveals just how much the odds of the Office for Students’ key performance indicators are stacked against academics and senior leadership teams working in widening participation universities, charged as we are with creating equal employment opportunities in a shamefully unequal society. As Brook et al. argue the relative advantage or disadvantage of socio-economic circumstances reflect ‘the continuing importance of traditional – family, and school-based – networks, and accumulated cultural capital, in mediating access to desirable jobs’ (2023). If the English education system doesn’t change, the class bias of the creative sector’s workforce will remain; cemented by the enhanced curricula and social networks of grammar, private, and ‘good’ state schools that select by via exclusion and postcode. This is an educational experience that is diametrically opposed to the heavy implementation of the EBacc in disadvantaged areas by schools desperate to placate Ofsted and enhance their chances of survival via league table performance (Centre for Social Justice, 2023).

Second, Brook et al. lift the veil of misplaced nostalgia that has been consolidated by the view that external forces (austerity’s cuts to arts funding, the EBacc, and the imposition of tuition fees) are wholly to blame for the exclusivity of our discipline. Again, it’s not us, it’s them. The arts have never been inclusive; Bourdieu said as much in 1999; our discipline is a toxic ‘universe where the operative principles are aesthetic qualities’ (2017). As he noted in his lectures on Manet and the École des Beaux Arts, ‘even today, the intellectual and artistic milieu tolerates people of humble origins much less well than the bourgeoisie’, disadvantaged as they are by the vital attributes of ‘accent’ and deportment (2017). The tyrannical effects of what Bourdieu named the ‘pure aesthetic’ are evident everywhere (2006). It festers Bourdieu’s contempt for the parochialism he ascribes to Courbet (2017); it lingers in the office next door, home to my colleague who was recently accosted by a

conference delegate who cheerfully informed him, ‘with that accent I thought you would be thick!’ Perhaps more startling, however, is that these claims to openness reek of the creative bohemian idyll, whose rhetoric legitimated decades of patriarchal, predatory studio culture. To claim that the arts were more open and inclusive in the past is to remove the discipline’s moral obligation to interrogate the exclusionary practices that shape its baseline assumptions in the present.

A timely examination of these mechanisms of displacement and their contiguity with wider economic, racial and social structural inequality in Britain, could be seen at the Baltic, Gateshead, last summer in the films of British-Ghanian artist Larry Achiampong. *Wayfinder* (2022, [trailer](#)) draws on gaming vernacular, following a lone character as they pursue a quest from place to place across a land from which they are estranged, fruitlessly searching for an affirmation of the right to be, to belong. Setting out from the wilds of Northumberland, the film’s black female protagonist finds themselves in the vestibule of the opulent Barry Rooms of the National Gallery, London. Vertiginous camera work reels from the eight great white male artists that adorn the cornice to walls hung exclusively with white, female nudes, disorientating the viewer. No longer at home in art’s pantheon the viewer is thus made ready to hear the barbed tone of the narrator; ‘our tutor challenged us with a task, to imagine things as *you* pictured them. As though there wasn’t an insurmountable gap between us’ (2022). *Expulsion* (2018, [trailer](#)) presents a more direct critique of the steady tide of micro and macroaggressions that embed disadvantage; the trap of low paid migrant work for the have nots, the failure of New Labour’s promise of ‘education, education, education’ for the successful graduate who collects JSA (Job Seeker’s Allowance); all thrown into sharp relief by the mindless pursuit of things for the haves. *Expulsion* and *Wayfinder* bring me back to the point I have been labouring about the inadequacies of a pedagogical culture built on appreciation and assimilation; the gap between consumerism, legitimate cultural capital and the ‘culture of necessity’ that governs the lives of everyday people (Bourdieu, 2006). In Britain today the gap between rich and poor continues to widen at an alarming rate (Equality Trust, 2023; Centre for Social Justice, 2023). But what Achiampong intimates and I want to emphasise is this isn’t so much a widening chasm as a cycle of excess, self-interest, and exploitation. In this context I want to suggest that the government’s Creative Industries Sector Vision published in June, which sets out plans to grow its revenue by £50bn by 2030 (UK Gov, 2023), isn’t a lifeline for the

arts it's another nail in the coffin. The one million jobs Rishi Sunak promises in that document will not be open to all, but to those who have made it through a highly select talent pipeline. The continued 'monetization of creativity' will partition off good art and design for those who can afford them. Culture will be confined to the novelties legitimized by a society committed to the exceptionalism of individuals, conveniently masking the homogeneity demanded by market forces and the exclusion they cement (Mould, 2018; Adorno, 1975).

5. 'A state of the art creative education? Place-based learning and making, inclusivity and innovation' January 2024.

In 2018 Oli Mould prefaced *Against Creativity* by arguing that 'creativity can be used to produce more social justice in the world' only if it can be 'rescued from its current incarceration as purely an engine for economic growth' (2018). The Creative Industries Sector Vision signposts the social value of the arts, setting out its 2030 Wellbeing Objective that references the National Academy for Social Prescribing, ACE and third sector arts and health initiatives. My fear is, however, that because activities such as these are non-profit by nature any neoliberal government will pay only lip service to them. There's no doubt that these initiatives can make a substantial contribution to the wellbeing of our society, but I know from first-hand experience that they are woefully under resourced. New starters working in those areas will not find the holy grail of an average graduate salary (a fate shared by the disabled, ethnic minorities and 6/10 women (HESA, 2023)). Creative courses will thus continue to be squeezed because of these 'poor' graduate outcomes as universities look for ways to tighten increasingly uncomfortable belts. Arts-based community engagement will continue to be sustained by poorly paid goodwill, staffed by graduates whose families can afford to subsidize their living costs. Provision for initiatives for the social value of the arts will remain piecemeal at best, hostage to the funds made available to over stretched Local Authorities, galleries and museums which face significant barriers to participation for working class communities ([link](#) to YSJU report, 2020).

If the arts are not to be reduced to some nightmarish marker of excess and status worthy of Suzanne Collins' Capitol (2008), the discipline *needs* those communities. For far too long colleagues in HEIs have hugged their specialist conceptual vocabularies and global knowledges as markers of the discipline's distinctiveness, a key weapon in the pitched battle

against the denigration of the arts in the ivory tower of the academy. In that climate a measure of distance between the proponents of the discipline and the ignorant masses 'who don't get it', was positively applauded; again, it's not us its them. But it is the instrumentalization of that distance that has made the arts so vulnerable. In 2015 the Conservative's Election Manifesto sought to ameliorate the party to 'ordinary' working people via the strengthened EBacc that would remove the arts from the statutory curriculum for KS4; taking education back for 'your' children, just as curbs on immigration would take back 'your' country. In other words, the Conservatives weaponized the fact that, as Jack said, outside the walls of my seminar room 'nobody cares about art'.

To survive, creative education and culture must be mobilized to tackle inequality and injustice rather than embed it. The first step to achieving that aim is to admit it's not them, it's us. Higher Education needs to provide a model for all levels of education that destabilizes the default veneration global cultural production, which always situates cultural capital elsewhere and dismisses the local as parochial. This hierarchy underscores the discipline's baseline assumptions about what does and does not constitute cultural capital, guiding admissions processes, assessment, curriculum and research design that are discriminatory. Instead, the generations and geographies of art and design must be resituated. As Zygmunt Bauman argued, 'on a planet open to the free circulation of capital and commodities, whatever happens in one place has a bearing on how people in all other places live, hope or expect to live' (2007). We therefore need to find strategies that reveal how the arts can be valuable for everyday people, engaged in their environments whilst acknowledging the wider mechanisms that govern the interplay of local places and global processes (Coates et al. 2016).

I want to cite two sector leading place-based initiatives responding to this context. First, is *Temporary Contemporary* and the cultural strategy consultation with Kirklees Council, third sector organisations, and ACE, captured in the Culture is Ordinary symposium ([link](#)), devised by colleagues in the School of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Huddersfield ([Link](#)). Instigated in 2018 and drawing on John Holden's 2015 report for the AHRC, which called for a non-hierarchical, ecological approach to the emergence of culture, they aim to initiate 'arts and cultural policy change' by taking 'necessary and strategic actions, where mixed ecologies of cultural activity work against the disciplinary policing of space with new assemblages of distributed power (Bailey, et al. 2019). Also based in Yorkshire and

coordinated by a consortium of four Local Cultural Partnerships and colleagues based at the University of Leeds, the *Culture on the Doorstep* pilot, is currently helping primary schools to explore how co-created 'place-based learning, within the context of a 15-minute neighbourhood, can build the cultural capital of children and young people' (Creative Learn Lab, 2023 [LINK](#)).

Both these projects are richer and more significant than I can do justice to here. But they call to mind the central tenants of educationalist Alec Clegg, Chief Education Officer of the West Riding of Yorkshire (1945-1974), then the largest education authority in Great Britain. Clegg believed that if we want children to grow into active citizens education must connect to and value their world, their homes and communities (Wood et al., 2021). A 'seminal figure of twentieth-century education' (Crawford, 2008), Clegg had been also mindful that a reliance on 'memory and mechanical skill' was 'at the expense of creative power' (Clegg, 1972). Clegg synthesised these two concerns, devising a place-based education system, underpinned by making-led exploration and experimentation, made possible by curriculum flexibility and teacher autonomy, which enhanced student engagement via enriched relationships between educators, students and their families.

In 2022 the government published its latest education White Paper, *Opportunity for All: Great Schools and Teachers for Your Child*, which recognises the need to create a greater sense of belonging for young people in schools and suggests increasing teacher autonomy to achieve that aim. While this change is welcome, the White Paper remains steadfastly committed to 'pump-priming social mobility' via a 'knowledge-based' education system (UK Gov). As Achiampong attests, the belonging and self-worth needed to do well in the world cannot be facilitated by a top-down curriculum. A curriculum is made fit for purpose by its ability to meet the needs of students, society and industry not by its capacity to provide an appraisable body of knowledge. In our era of global cultural and economic exchange, Clegg's legacy is a model that could help young people grasp that home is both complex and meaningful. It could equip them with a sense of belonging, contextualising disadvantage beyond deficit, generating confidence and curiosity that is indebted to the knowledge that success in the wider world doesn't mean having to abandon the culture of home.

The Government's 2022 White Paper clearly signals that, as far as current educational reform goes, the curriculum is off the table (or so everyone keeps telling me). But I have devised curricula and assessment by scaffolding learning in more revalidations

than I now care to remember, and I am convinced that unless the paucity of understanding that shapes the National Curriculum for Art & Design is addressed, the discipline will never be inclusive, leaving it more precarious as a result. What would have got closer to the mark were the recommendations of Renfrew's working party in 1991, mentioned in the previous blog. Like Clegg the working party recognised the creative power and potential of the processes of 'investigating, making and understanding'. So, I want to close (finally) with a radical proposition, by drawing attention to the keen resemblance between Clegg's ethos, the language employed by Renfrew et al. and point 1.8 of the 2016 QAA Benchmarks for Art & Design, which states:

Art and design skills, particularly those in 'making', contribute to cognitive development and engage learners. Through engagement with materials, processes and ideas, 'making' develops creativity, inventiveness, problem solving and practical intelligence (QAA 2016).

I think that it is possible to reverse engineer art and design education in England from this QAA Benchmark. I can see how an emphasis on making, investigation and understanding could embed the social value of the arts in the National Curriculum from year 0 to 13. I can see how it could act as a basis for an inclusive and interdisciplinary curriculum that accommodates place-based approaches to learning in a global context, constructively aligned to university pedagogy, and the needs of industry but serving the needs of people who won't go to university as much as those who will. Such a curriculum could vitalise the arts' capacity for social change and the economy's needs for independent, resourceful graduates; people who understand that problem solving is a situated process, an exciting exploration of the not yet known. Couldn't that be the beginning of a more inclusive, healthy and successful creative workforce?