



Curricular of the Future, SERP Reactivated organised by Peckham Platform, at Tate Exchange, 21 April 2018

What is at stake for young people in today's test-driven, accountability and performance-measured education system? With more and more schools wearing an E-Bacc 'straightjacket' (which needless to say does *not* include an arts subject) what can we learn from the past and how do we challenge policy makers to design and implement a curriculum that embraces the historic, the contemporary and the future.

This is what we know so far: In 2016 we published [NSEAD's survey report](#), it was a health check, indeed, a health warning for our subject. We asked, how has government policy, impacted on art, craft and design education? Across all key stages between 33-43% of teacher respondents said in the last five years less time had been given to our subject in their school. Last year, art and design GCSE exam entries fell to the lowest recorded this century. This year a BBC survey found music, art, drama and design and technology were being cut.

This sorry tale means that we have to use learn lessons from the past. Archives provide us with hard evidence and research. They inform NSEAD's advocacy work, our consultations, our manifesto *and* our curriculum.

This year NSEAD is 130 years old, with this comes an extensive archive, the National Arts Education Archive and housed in Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Through the archive we know of significant 'movements' and intellectual tensions, political twists and turns in the past, we know about historical and contexts and the evolution of the curriculum, So, what lessons have we learnt?

We have proof that the arts challenge negative stereotypes and promote inclusive debate. The arts expand our thoughts, our experience and encourage positive awareness of community. In NSEAD's own curriculum, a curriculum that parallels the 2014 national curriculum, we've replaced 'greatest' artists with the contemporary and the living. We want engagement with contemporary practitioners, where young people learn *how* to confront the issues of the day. In life 'knowing how' is just as important as 'knowing that'. In SERP's 'Recycle and Discuss' and today with The Charter School, we see why creativity

and engagement matters – we see young people with agency, asking challenging questions.

Our subject also fosters an understanding of the environment, a point spelt out by NSEAD patron, Bob and Roberta Smith. In his infamous 2011 letter, to the then education minister, Michael Gove, He wrote: ‘Look around you. What do you see? Everything is made. Everything has been fashioned by human beings who have considered all aspects of what they have made’. In this statement he has emphasised that our subject is at the core of our human experience. Show me something in this room that has *not* been designed. But, returning again to the backward facing national curriculum – it claims to introduce pupils ‘to the best that has been *thought* and *said*.’ We added expressed, designed, made and developed.

The arts, research shows, promote ‘**enjoyment and engagement**’. A longitudinal report published under Barack Obama’s administration *Reinvesting in Arts Education* showed that low-income children who participated in arts-rich curriculums in the 90s, were four more times likely to have high academic achievement and three times more likely to have high attendance than those who didn’t. Updates to these studies, tracking the same young people well into their mid-twenties, showed that these advantages, including social mobility, only increase over time. Government policymakers are ignoring this research.

Returning to Michael Gove’s 2014 curriculum, it states children should ‘Know *about*, and engender an *appreciation* of human creativity and achievement.’ We replaced this arguably ‘passive’ terminology with ‘engagement’ and ‘participation’. We want more than ‘know about’ we want *inspiration, risk, imagination* and *challenge*. This resonates with Rita Keegan’s SERP artist statement, from 1989: You wrote ‘achievement need not only be measured in winning and being first. The feeling of creativity, the doing, is the most valuable thing you can have’. We applaud you and we will continue to recommend that the Ofsted accountability framework for schools is revised to include the impact of creativity in the curriculum.

Turning to NSEAD’s advocacy work, and later this year we’ll be publishing guidance, to explain why art matters:

It begins: **Art, craft and design is for...**

Visual literacy and personal expression – Let’s face it – we now live in an image saturated world, let’s learn to read it.

For inclusion and diversity: [Share [Define and Reuse](#)] e.g. *I worked on at The Charter School, it’s in our archive (filmed as it was then for Teachers TV). The project was called, quite coincidentally, as I knew nothing of SERP: ‘Define and reuse.’ It too used recycled materials to (re)define, ‘who we are’...this and the materials used were the starting*

points. Students worked collaboratively, and one group's response involved a map of Southwark, on which was placed an England football shirt. On this the group collaged a face made from many heads. These heads, they said, 'represented the many hundreds of languages spoken in Southwark'. The eyes were made from beer-bottle tops saying 'London Pride'.

Art... provides access to career pathways.

Art matters... for health and wellbeing – in a test driven, accountability focussed education system it isn't any wonder more people are suffering from mental health. The arts nurture wellbeing.

Art teaches... and I'm quoting Elliot Eisener here, that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer. 'It allows us to have judgment without rule.'

We've already noted that the arts **raise confidence** and **attainment** (across the curriculum).

Art turns **STEM into STEAM**. The CBI (the confederation of British Industry) has called for a creative or technical subject to be included within the specification of the EBacc.

And, for our final arts curriculum quest, we turn to **UNESCO's rights of the child**. Article 31 states that it is the right of every child: 'to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities' But, again we know this just isn't the case. Your neighbour, Rufus Norris, artistic director at the National Theatre, rightly asks: 'How can a school without five minutes of art get an Ofsted 'good'?'

We agree... access to the arts, must not be by postcode, or as we are now seeing by stealth (our survey showed independent schools were largely retaining their arts-rich curriculums). Access to the arts, within a broad and balanced curriculum, across all phases and in all sectors, must surely be a right, not a privilege.

And so, to end: Archives are disruptive, they teach us about the transformative nature of the arts and that the arts are an essential part of our lives. The SERP archive is testament to the value of students working with artists, but more specifically, working *as* artists. The UK has a rich cultural and creative heritage – the SERP archive has a big part to play in this. It shows us what's at stake and why we will keep promoting and *defending* our subject.

Sophie Leach

Assistant General Secretary, NSEAD and *AD* magazine, Editor

21 April 2018