



Art & cultural education - what is needed in post-Covid lockdown recovery?

Focus group with Cultural Education champions in Liverpool schools, 6 July 2020

Context/background

In June 2020, the Liverpool Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) invited 'cultural champions' in local schools to take part in a survey, completed by 19 people (see separate report). This aimed to learn about their experiences of teaching remotely during lockdown, and support they might welcome from the arts and cultural sector for the 'new normal' when schools eventually reopened. The focus group on the 6th July was a follow-up with five of the survey participants, to invite deeper insights.

Focus group participants

Seven people took part in the focus group, facilitated by the Liverpool Cultural Education Partnership Coordinator, from Liverpool Learning Partnership (LLP). They included:

- One primary teacher – a Year 6 class teacher and Art Coordinator
- Two mainstream secondary teachers – both subject leaders of arts subjects, including: creative arts; art, media, design and technology.
- Two teachers in Special Educational Needs schools – one Head of art and also Deputy Head; the other Learning and Inclusion Mentor/Careers Leader.
- Two representatives from cultural organisations: Education Manager, Schools at National Museums Liverpool (NML); and Programme Manager: Children and Young People at Tate Liverpool

Focus group questions and summary of responses

1. What are the problems you're facing in keeping pupils engaged in arts and cultural learning at this time?

- Digital inequality and lack of ICT resources.
- Lack of educational support at home.
- Pupils have no internet access or are sharing devices with siblings/other family members. Some children are trying to work on their parent's phones.
- Difficult clashes between siblings – with the child with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) being deprioritised for use of the computer.
- There is not as much parental support for arts subjects – they are further down the pecking order and there is a focus on English, maths and science. *(However, two secondary schools reported a good response from parents to arts activities, which were a release from stress. Some have really enjoyed the art and creative themes, getting young people involved in baking, drawing, creating*

posters, and using Facebook in a really positive way to recording pupils' responses to learning opportunities – Facebook has provided a very family-friendly and cross-curricular platform.)

- Although there has been some support to alleviate digital inequality (summarised in the next section below), for example, providing tablets to pupils in receipt of pupil premium, the other barrier is that parents and grandparents are not 'au fait' with technology and lack the skills to help children access digital platforms.
- Usually the school makes use of galleries and museums as part of the Year 6 curriculum in the first half term, for example teaching about slavery. These visits will now not be possible providing a barrier to learning.
- Budget restrictions for both schools and arts organisations is a big challenge. Some school/education budgets have been cut by 50% - there is as little as £2000 for the whole year.

2. What are your actions/ideas for resolving these so far?

School approaches to overcoming digital inequality:

- Providing some computers to pupils most in need.
- Delivering paper copies of work to families.
- Repurposing school laptops – given to Year 10 and 12 pupils as priority year groups.
- Issuing limited numbers of laptops and routers to students who were most in need – one staff family member donated 20 computers from her law firm.

Suggestions for improving access to art and culture:

- City-wide online events – GCSE and A level arts students would benefit from researching local artists as well as artists from other countries – for example, competition-based projects raising the profile of creative arts.
- Digital workshops to showcase different arts techniques and teach new skills – it is helpful to teachers to have someone from outside the school engage young people (perhaps targeting Years 10, 12 and 13).
- Schools could share the costs of booking artists to provide digital workshops – everyone is going to need to think of creative ways to pool resources and share costs. All teachers agreed they would welcome this opportunity to work with other schools. This has got to be the way forward.
- Whilst visits to arts venues are difficult if not impossible, we can make arts experiences accessible using films and online galleries. This has worked well in the past with children and young people at Alder Hey who are unable to leave the hospital for visits.
- Can museums bring exhibits into schools? What digital resources are there? How can pupils benefit from museums and venues without getting on bus and getting into town?

Digital platforms and activities that schools would recommend:

- Google classroom would work really well – for example, a curator could talk about an exhibition and invite questions from pupils.
- Microsoft Teams worked really well for one school's live virtual tour of a zoo in Wales, during which they could ask the zoo keeper questions.
- Schools can access any platform as long as it's safe.

Topics and themes that are important:

- Teachers will definitely have to look at topical issues such as the Black Lives Matter movement, in the first half term. Pupils need to be able to speak about this – they have been surrounded by it for months.
- Can a professional curator give some advice about these sensitive subjects? Colleagues have said they would like advice and guidance on how to teach slavery appropriately. They want to be able to teach it correctly, be more mindful of sensitivities. There is a concern that some people will back away from teaching about slavery and anti-racism for fear of causing offence.
- LLP has set up a Black Lives Matter Curriculum and Policy Review Group which had its first meeting on 2nd July. This will run for a year and aims to influence local education policy and change across the whole curriculum, to support the Black Lives Matter movement. Members have made a strong recommendation already that the focus on Black lived experiences must not be limited to the history curriculum.

3. How could the cultural sector offer support?

National Museums Liverpool (NML)

NML has done a survey with schools in their network to find out which of their offers are most helpful. Based on that, they will develop six of their most popular sessions remotely, as digital video conferences. They are open to schools visiting but not in September. They will trial their digital offer first but because of budget cuts they will need to charge – but the positive is that schools won't have to pay for coaches. The six remote sessions will focus on:

- Ancient Egypt
- Ancient Greece
- Arts
- Titanic
- International Slavery Museum/transatlantic slavery
- History of Liverpool

NML is probably tied to using Microsoft Teams for safety. They will be mindful of mental health needs and build time for reflection into the sessions. Some will be pre-recorded but can be responsive to class interests, and as interactive as possible.

Tate Liverpool

There are four Tate sites across the country, set to reopen on 27th July, but no site will host any group visits until at least January 2021. They are focusing on remote, digital/online delivery.

Liverpool has a smaller budget than the London galleries and plans to make use of digital resources being developed by these. This can give people access to artists on the other side of world and virtual tours of galleries exhibiting both local and international art.

Tate Liverpool itself plans to focus time and energy on local groups they already have relationships with. They are going through a process of trying to decide what to develop: live or pre-recorded sessions? What platform? However resources are so limited that they may not be able to provide many of these. They can instead offer advice, share ideas and direct people towards practitioners.

Conscious of digital poverty and access issues, Tate has done what they can to distribute physical resources via YPAS (Young People's Advisory Service). They are also working in partnership through the LCEP with Comics Youth and NML to provide resources for Looked After and other vulnerable children over the summer holidays and into next academic year.

Tate Liverpool may be able to arrange some kind of virtual tour of the Ideas Depot collection, co-curated with primary school teachers and pupils.

Teacher responses

- Particularly for the primary school, the NML offer was hugely welcomed, especially if it can support learning in relation to Black Lives Matter.
- Teachers said they could be flexible about when and how sessions were available and should be able to direct students to them at the right time.
- A young person with experience of a supported internship at NML has amazing knowledge of the topics of Titanic and Egyptian history – he's an expert we can call on!
- Secondaries would welcome any resources to support GCSE research on artists – particularly with a focus on local artists/artists featured in galleries, who they could potentially see in a specific exhibition or a virtual tour, rather than just random/ generic websites that students google for themselves.
- There is also a strong interest in artists using emerging technology and digital resources – some pupils have resources to create digital work.

Conclusion

- Keeping art and culture alive for children and young people is so important, particularly for those whose talents and future career paths lie in this area. This must not be reliant on digital platforms only.
- City-wide, high-profile initiatives will support schools to engage pupils with art and culture.
- Teachers welcome support covering current topical social issues, such as Black Lives Matter.
- Teachers offered participation in future meetings and support to cultural organisations who are struggling with the financial impact of Covid.
- Pooling resources is more important than ever.

There are so many arts and cultural organisations, big and small, in Liverpool offering arts and cultural activity for children and young people. The LCEP will continue to signpost schools, families and children and young people to what's on offer via the following:

For children, young people and families: <https://padlet.com/LCEP/letscreate>

For teachers and professionals wanting to find or share arts and cultural education opportunities: www.culturepool.org