

A Case Study of Collaborative Practice: Working to promote cross-curricular thinking and making within schools.

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Abstract

Within the changing landscape of secondary education, the role of making and creative thinking is increasingly marginalised within the curriculum. As a result, we are seeing an emerging skills shortage for those contemplating studying not just fashion and textiles or other creative disciplines but also courses that value the ability to work creatively and blend a mix of attributes at a higher level.

The case study outlined in this short paper, documents a project undertaken as part of the Crafts Council's (2017) Make Your Future initiative which looks to partner schools, art teachers, makers and higher education institutes, with the aim of promoting craft and making to the next generation. The project saw Wadkin and Pratt collaborate with a selection of key stage 3 students across two schools, with the aim of encouraging greater take up of Textiles and Fashion as a GCSE subject, helping to develop essential skills for creative thinking and improving motor skills in relation to making. Drawing upon the textile heritage of the North of England, United Kingdom (UK), students developed contemporary fashion print outcomes that reinterpreted traditional woven textile techniques for the sportswear market. The focus was on improving hand skills through analogue design methods, while linking with technology, science and mathematical concepts to further cross-disciplinary thinking. In addition, key stage 3 students involved with the project were introduced to roles within textiles and fashion not currently explored within the curriculum.

The project culminated in a collaborative exhibition at Leeds Arts University, celebrating the work produced across a number of institutes involved in similar projects across the region. As a result of this project, participants were given the opportunity to develop and explore competences required within the fashion and textile industries thus promoting the need for universities to work with schools in order to protect creative education, foster essential skills and inspire the next generation of designers and creative thinkers.

Key words: education; collaboration; textiles; Creative Industries; recruitment.

Introduction

Within the United Kingdom (UK), the changing landscape within secondary education and the increasing marginalisation of the creative subjects in favour of more traditional academic subjects is placing increasing pressures on those wanting to follow a career in the creative industries. As a result, we are seeing an emerging

skills shortage for those contemplating studying not just fashion and textiles or other creative disciplines but also courses that value the ability to work creatively and blend a mix of attributes at a higher level - crucial for the developing economy in a range of industry sectors. The long-term impact of how these changes may affect the creative industries is yet to fully be seen, however, universities are already noticing a more challenging environment for recruitment to the creative disciplines, a trend which looks set to continue.

The particular case study described through this paper explores the authors ongoing research into the current disconnect between the UK creative industries and arts education. It examines the function of universities and academics to bridge the gap between these sectors and assist in finding solutions to the emerging arts education crisis. We question whether collaboration with schools and the arts industry to promote cross-curricular thinking and making can lead to a more sustainable creative economy.

The Creative Skills Gap

Presently, UK creative industries are thriving; recent statistics show that the number of jobs in the UK creative economy reached just over 2 million, an increase of 1.6% on the previous year and accounted for 6.2% of all UK jobs in 2018. Between 2011 and 2018, creative industries employment has grown by 30.6 per cent, compared to the UK average growth of 10.1 per cent during that period (UK Government 2018).

In 2016, the UK creative industries were worth £91.8 billion to the UK economy growing at more than double the speed of the wider economy in the period 2015-2016, at a rate of 7.6% compared to 3.5% of growth for the economy as a whole. Making it worth more than the automotive, life sciences, aerospace and oil and gas industries combined (UK Government [Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport](#) 2016). In recognition of this booming economy in November 2018, the Creative Industries Trade and Investment Board (CITIB) was given £5 million of government support with the aim of increasing the creative industries exports and trade by 50% by 2023 (UK Government 2018). When interviewed by the UK Government Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport the chair of the CITIB, Annette King commented on the huge potential within this market stating that 'Creativity is the UK's calling card to the world; our reputation for ideas, flair, talent and imagination sitting alongside our rich cultural heritage and cutting-edge creative companies' (Margot, J. and Stuart, G 2018 : no pagination).

Creative skills are not only recognised within the creative jobs market as a study by Cultural Learning Alliance and NESTA (2017) highlighted. For the UK to grow and exploit new economic opportunities, the workforce of tomorrow not only needs strong academic understanding of key subjects across Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) but also the Arts which brings innovation, creativity and inquisitiveness (Cultural Learning Alliance and NESTA 2017). This Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Maths (STEAM) based approach to developing a

broad range of personal skills in the future workforce is increasingly recognised by industry; both cultural and more traditional market sectors. Mark Carney (2016: no pagination), the Governor of the Bank of England proclaims that ‘...in the age where anyone can produce anything anywhere through 3D printing, where anyone can broadcast their performance globally or sell to China whatever the size of their business, there is an opportunity for mass employment through mass creativity’. Internationally, employers value employees with twenty-first century skills; a mix of cognitive and personal abilities like creativity, dexterity and collaboration alongside subject knowledge.

Unfortunately, this positive outlook is set against a somewhat gloomier educational backdrop. Creativity within schools is declining and the workforce for this proposed future of creativity is in crisis and under great threat in the UK. One of the leading factors in this is the introduction of the English Baccalaureate within secondary schools. The EBacc prioritises STEM subjects, demoting the importance of creative subjects, which has resulted in a 10% decline in students selecting arts related GCSE’s between 2017 and 2018 (Cultural Learning Alliance 2018). In their study into the creative arts crisis, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) reported that 45% of respondent schools, the National Curriculum requirement for Art and Design and Design and Technology teaching was being curtailed by one year, with Key Stage 3 effectively ending in year 8 when pupils are around 12-13 meaning fewer studying it to a higher level (HEPI 2017). A report by the Sorrell Foundation (2017) indicates a 20.3% decline in the number of pupils taking creative GCSE’s since it was introduced in 2010 roughly equating to 133,500 fewer GCSE’s. As a result of this, registrations for creative subject based A-levels have been particularly hard hit with a continuing decline: entries down 24% since 2010, with a 6% decline in Art & Design and a 41% decline in Design Technology A-level entries in the same period (Cultural Learning Alliance 2018). Survey findings from the Association of School and College Leaders (2018) show that 31% of their members have had to cut back on lesson time, staff or facilities in design and technology A-level subjects over the past two years.

Consequently, within higher education (HE) the trend sadly continues with applications down, specifically for Fashion and Textile programmes, and courses are being forced to close or merge. Julia Bennett (2017), Head of Research and Policy at the Crafts Council reports that craft students and courses, are rapidly decreasing and declined by 50% between 2007/08 and 2014/15 (Pooley and Rowel 2016) indicating similar wider sector shifts within education. The disconnect between educational policy and industry is something that many within the creative sector are rightly concerned about. Sir Peter Bazalgette (2017), the Arts Council chairman has highlighted the importance of addressing the future skills gap within the creative sector and the need to grow our ‘talent pipeline’. From an industry sector perspective, projects are beginning to emerge, independently addressing concerns related to the skills gap and to inspire the future generation to consider a creative

career. One such example is the Burberry Inspire initiative (Burberry Foundation 2018) which looks to link pupils in secondary schools with organisations across theatre, film, dance and art and provide them with inspirational workshops and experiences to study the impact of arts education on young people's lives.

Case Study: Promoting Creative Skills in Secondary Education

The role of universities in this troubling disconnect is crucial to protect creative arts education as well as the skills and knowledge needed by the creative economy and as academics the authors of this study recognise their position in this. Both Gareth Wadkin and Caroline Pratt work part-time as academic staff on the BA (Hons) Printed Textile and Surface Pattern degree (soon to be BA (Hons) Textile Design) at Leeds Arts University. Wadkin holds a further post within the Progression and Widening Participation team at the University and Pratt works as a freelance designer across the interior and greetings sector. Consequently both authors are well placed to experience these emerging concerns first hand. For several years, Wadkin has worked closely with a number of secondary schools around West Yorkshire to champion and campaign for creative arts education. Whereas, Pratt understands the demands within the design sector for employees who are flexible, have fantastic making abilities, creatively engaged and unafraid to test, push and experiment with their practice - all skills that studying creative disciplines will teach. As part of collaborative research around this subject, this study saw the authors collaborate with the Crafts Council (2017) as part of their Make Your Future scheme which shares similar aims and values on the promotion of craft and making in schools. The project co-ordinates and funds collaborations between secondary schools, designer makers, art teachers and HE institutes across London, Birmingham and Yorkshire, with the aim of placing makers into schools to promote creative careers and teach new, inspiring techniques to pupils prior to them selecting their GCSE pathway.

Our role within the scheme was to work with Key Stage 3 students, age 11-14, across two Yorkshire based schools, Castleford Academy and Horsforth School, with the aim of encouraging greater take up of Fashion and Textiles as a GCSE subject. Working primarily with transfer sublimation print techniques and drawing from textile heritage of the North of England, student's developed contemporary fashion print outcomes that reinterpreted traditional woven textile techniques to create designs aimed at the sportswear market (figures 1-3). Elements of STEAM based learning were drawn upon through links to Science and changes of matter through the dye transfer process and mathematical skills of working with and planning sequences to design and develop woven designs. This helped to develop student's cross-disciplinary thinking and introduce them to techniques and links to creative careers not currently explored within the curriculum.

Figure 1: Examples of printed designs created by students at Horsforth School, 2018.

Figure 2: Students working on designs as part of the workshop, 2018.

Figure 3: Example of design boards and final sportswear prints produced during the workshop, 2018.

Alongside the student focused workshops, continuing professional development (CPD) sessions were also delivered to teachers with the aim of improving their confidence and their creative skillset, providing them with new knowledge and lesson ideas that would enable them to teach and inspire pupils to engage with creative subjects in new ways.

The project culminated in a collaborative 'Make Your Future' exhibition at Leeds Arts University (Wadkin and Pratt 2018) (figure 4), which celebrated the work produced by students across a number of schools which were involved in similar projects across the region. An additional collaborative element was built into this exhibition through participating with Nike Product Manager, Michael Ford, to deliver an interactive careers workshop with some of the student participants. This involved a careers talk and a practical workshop, in which pupils designed trainers and others sportswear items (figure 5). Through adding this additional layer of collaboration with the design industry, students were further inspired to think about their creative career aspirations and the importance of their previous experiences in relation to real life applications.

Figure 4: Students attending the Make Your Future 2018 exhibition.

Figure 5: Students taking part in the sportswear workshop lead by Nike.

The feedback from schools regarding the engagement with staff and pupils was highly positive, with many of the schools reporting renewed interest in creative GCSE's. An example shared here supported the success of our work with their students;

Thanks again for such an amazing experience with the MYF project, it has been a tremendous success and has helped encourage many more students to take up Textiles at both GCSE and A Level. Last year we did not have the numbers to run either of these courses but this year we have 18 students for GCSE Textiles. The project created a real buzz around school and really inspired many students. (Teacher from Castleford Academy 2018)

This result is very encouraging and reinforces our aims for the research to date.

Conclusion

The partnering of schools, creative industries and universities appears to be an important collaboration in fulfilling the objectives to: enrich art, design and craft teaching in schools; protect creative courses in HE; and promote creative skills for

the future workforce. This initial case study represents the start of a period of research which continues to look at ways to promote the take up of creative skills in schools and beyond. With the Make Your Future project as a model, the next phase of research will see the authors trialling a similar strategy as part of the BA (Hons) Textile Design recruitment plan, developing new and building on existing partnerships with schools, colleges and industry to ensure that we are providing students with relevant skills needed in the jobs market, working with teachers to develop their knowledge of creative career paths and help to work on student's creative ambitions and aspirations from early on in their educational journey. As the research presented in this paper continues to develop, the long-term sustainability of such a model needs careful consideration as it undoubtedly brings new challenges to educational institutions, such as those relating to financial investment and joined up thinking between all levels of academia, educational policy makers and industry.

The future for the creative industries is potentially a bright one but this is not something that can be taken for granted and faces many external challenges. If the early promotion of creative skills is fostered within schools and a strategic model for creative development is implemented, we will surely see an upturn in the transition and progression of creative individuals through HE and into the creative sector.

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