

## Art and Cultural learning to stimulate creativity

In recent years creativity has become a prevailing catchword. In a society constantly aspiring to innovation and "progress", creativity incarnates the trends for novelty, dynamism and excitement. At different levels – individuals, enterprises, cities, regions or countries, policy makers are increasingly taking up "creativity" as their motto.

Europe's place in the world is increasingly determined by its capacity to keep innovating both economically and socially. With an economic context characterised by financial upheavals, with growing environmental concerns and a need to focus on sustainable development, the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires us to think differently and creatively about economic and human development. Creativity is considered as key to addressing those challenges and education can play a decisive role in developing and advancing creativity.

But how do we actually accomplish this? What can be done to increase individual's creativity and build the creative generation of tomorrow? KEA European Affairs has been conducting a study for the European Commission on the *Impact of Culture on Creativity*<sup>1</sup>. The objective of the study is to give a better understanding of the influence of culture on creativity, a motor of economic and social innovation.

If investigating the relationship between creativity and culture seems an easy prospect, the link between creativity and culture becomes less evident in relation to the idea that creativity generates economic and social innovation. It is to characterise that link that the study develops the notion of culture-based creativity. Stemming from art and cultural productions or activities, culture-based creativity nurtures innovation and goes beyond artistic achievements or "creative content" feeding broadband networks.

### How can arts and culture influence learner's creativity?

Art and culture can play a substantial role in nurturing creative minds in educational settings. To emerge culture-based creativity requires personal abilities (ability to think laterally or in a non-linear way, to be imaginative), technical skills (often artistic skills or craftsmanship) and a social environment, which comprises notably education and learning environment.

However, despite a general consensus that creativity should be encouraged in learning, very little attention has been paid to how arts and culture can enhance the creativity of learners. KEA's study on the *Impact of Culture on Creativity* examines hence how culture-based creativity can be fostered through arts education, at all levels.

The learning environment influences creative skills: it may comfort, stimulate or "kill" such personal ability. It is itself dependant on a social context which gives more or less value to creativity features in assessing abilities: intuition, emotional intelligence, craftsmanship, imagination. Creativity in learning, according to contemporary thinking, is triggered by the interplay of various factors that constitutes the creative eco-system.

- Creativity in learning is about fostering "flexibility, openness for the new, the ability to adapt or to see new ways of doing things and the courage to face the unexpected."<sup>2</sup> Imagination, divergent thinking and intuition need to be considered are important characteristics of artists and can be particularly fostered by progressive arts and culture learning.
- Arts education focuses on the process rather than the outcome, which is encouraging children to be more original and assertive. Taking risks without fearing to fail is the cornerstone of creative endeavour. The mainstreaming of the arts is a favourable way to achieve high-academic results in other disciplines.
- Arts classes and higher-education schools particularly nurture creativity in the way art is learned and taught. Their modes of teaching generally consist of promoting critical reflection, innovation, and the ability to question orthodoxies. The frequency with which learners are exposed to art and culture education needs to be combined with sustainability and quality.

### Towards inter-disciplinarity across learning fields

Art and culture contribute to making learners more creative and creativity is a skill requirement that increasingly cuts across different disciplines. Hence, art- or culture-based creativity can be transferred to other learning domains.

1. KEA, the Impact of Culture on Creativity, European Commission, European Commission, June 2009. The study is available on [www.keanet.eu](http://www.keanet.eu)

2. Cropley, *Creativity in education and learning, a guide for teacher and educator*, Routledge 2001.



Art requires a divergent cognitive process. The ability to think in analogies or in a non-linear way can contribute to help us break down artificial boundaries between different disciplines. Such thinking represents an advantage in investigative processes, intellectual risk-taking and the ability to see multiple solutions to a problem which if applied appropriately foster a set of transferrable skills. This ability to work and collaborate across different disciplines is important in project-based work.

The main benefit of having the arts mainstreamed throughout the whole curriculum is that it creates eager learners and helps to prevent them from being early school-leavers. Art engages pupils' "critical thinking" and encourages them to produce independent judgements and use their imagination. Moreover, art is an enjoyable discipline that generally induces motivation and commitment. Young people learn better when they are actively involved. The mainstreaming of arts is hence a way to avoid the passivity that characterises students in many classrooms and can thereby trigger their interests in other disciplines.

Arts also have a larger role to play in this learning transformation in higher education as they can help students to develop the creative skill sets needed to be real innovators and entrepreneurs. There is a growing interest in the transferability of arts graduates' creative skill sets to other sectors. Recent research commissioned by NESTA<sup>3</sup> in the UK shows that fine arts graduates are well adapted to the needs of the knowledge economy. However, it also identifies barriers to success, including long-standing attitudes and biases regarding the contribution that arts graduates make to the wider economy. Creative graduates need to gain awareness of the transferability of their skill.

In higher education, innovative and paradigm-shifting ideas (whether business-related or social) are often the result of being at the intersection of different "disciplines". Finland recently initiated such an impressive shift away from technology-driven innovation towards more human-centred innovation with the ambitious Aalto University project (a private-public partnership) that brings together art, business, and technology studies on the same campus.

## How to concretely attain culture-based creativity through art and culture learning?

Despite Europe's enormous assets in terms of education systems, cultural institutions and wealth of ideas, artists and creative people, Europe does not yet stimulate and encourage enough culture-based creativity. The contribution of arts and culture education to creativity is not yet sufficiently recognised.

Given that "it is easier to enhance creativity by changing conditions in the environment than by trying to make people think more creatively"<sup>4</sup>, policy makers, at both the EU and the national levels, need to pay specific attention to the shaping of favourable learning conditions. Putting culture and art nearer to the centre of learning policies requires openness and boldness. It requires policy makers, practitioners and learners to break with traditional segregations between disciplines and brings into questions a sometimes isolated focus on numeracy, literacy and the natural sciences.

The promotion of imagination and disruptive creative thoughts as well as cross-fertilisation amongst learning disciplines should be achieved by:

- Promoting art and culture in life long learning (including both formal and informal education);
- Recognising the value of alternative education methods whose focus is on the development of individual creativity (Reggio Emilia, Waldorf, Montessori, Decroly, etc.);
- Encouraging the mix of competences and interdisciplinary activities (business, engineering, sciences – including social sciences, and art and design) at university level;
- Increasing creative partnerships and cross-fertilisation between education, cultural and entrepreneurial activities.

It is important that any emerging innovative learning strategy at European level explicitly recognises the role of art and cultural expression as catalysts for creativity. As Cropley argues, there is a danger "that the call for creativity has become simply a catch-cry that is not really regarded as having any serious implications for actual practice."<sup>5</sup>

Elodie Vaisberg  
evaisberg@keanet.eu

3. Oakley, Sperry and Pratt, *The Art of Innovation, how fine arts graduates contribute to innovation*. NESTA, London, 2008.

4. Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

5. Op. cit. Cropley, 2001.



EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Rue du Trône, 51 • B-1050 Brussels • T +32 (0)2 289 26 00  
F +32 (0)2 289 26 06 • www.keanet.eu • www.keablog.com