

Obliterating the limits: can arts projects raise pupil achievement and encourage participation in the process of local change? - Summary

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Background Information

Theme: Community Life
Region/Nation: Literature review - no geographic base
Commissioned by: Royal National Theatre (Education and Training)
Funded by: RNT (E&T)

Objectives of work

To review the literature and provide a report that answered the question "Have interventions or initiatives which utilise artistic media as a catalyst for community development and change achieved successful outcomes?"

Synopsis of findings

1. There is some evidence of moderate levels of transferability between arts programmes and other academic subjects in terms of enhanced skills, but the evidence base is weak.
2. High levels of satisfaction are typically reported by participants in community based arts programmes; this covers areas of personal, community and economic change. However, using the most demanding standards of methodological rigour, the quality of studies is poor, though often very ambitious in an area so hard to evaluate.
3. Actual programme impacts are likely to be more moderate than often claimed - this is not unique to the arts. Both programme managers and funders should not demand or propose unrealistic objectives.
4. Dissonance between empirical models of evaluation and the artistic community is commonly encountered. Both parties must understand and respect each others methods and objectives in order for *useful* - as opposed to just accurate - results to emerge.
5. Arts programmes are increasingly expected to justify themselves by their capacity to improve learning outcomes in other academic subjects, or by their contribution to wider community goals. Evaluators, however, must also focus on the broader and richer quality of life experienced by individuals and communities who are enabled to participate in the full range of artistic media.
6. Securing the participation of young people, as opposed to adults, requires a higher level of support, both in terms of intensity and longevity. Furthermore, young people, as opposed to

adults, are less likely to be motivated by objectives associated with personal, economic of community change, and more by the benefits they perceive in the 'here and now' and the opportunity to change adult perceptions of their maturity and competence. In short, young people are likely to be more interested in the contribution the arts can make to their quality of life in the present, adults to the impact on young people's careers as future citizens.

Key messages

- The public and participants love community arts programmes
- Programme impacts are very hard to measure
- Evaluators and artists will rarely see eye to eye
- Young people are more interested in the 'here and now' of arts programmes rather than whether it will make them 'better' people in the future.

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