

2026 – Time for a New Relationship?



What can art educators learn from non-extractive practices?

As we welcome in a new year, starting a new term and imagining new ways of being, perhaps we can, as art educators, turn also towards new ways of understanding our relationship with our sense of creative purpose.

It would, of course, be ideal to start the new year with a sense of optimism and energy—and for many, that will be the case—and if so, all good. But we do need to recognise that for many people, both educators and those we educate, we ended the year with a feeling of overwhelm and perhaps even

exhaustion.

If we were lucky, it was great to be able to step off our productivity-driven, daily grind. Returning (and again, lucky us to have something to return to) has made me think about how we might begin to look in on this driven culture from a slightly different angle, especially in the light of learning to re-see what the visual arts can offer us, to help us be happier, healthier, more connected human beings. How can we learn to move forward, incrementally, in a way which is more sustainable, to both ourselves (as cyclical beings) and the planet? How can we help lay the groundwork so that the children and young people we teach and care for can imagine a more sustainable approach to their own lives?

The notion of *non-extraction* comes from a critical understanding of extractive economies, as applied to industry, the environment or colonialism. Any mechanism, organisational structure, or way of being which takes more out than it puts back in (intentionally or otherwise), leaving the source or those in its path depleted, might be seen as extractive. Non-extractive practices on the other hand, attempt to preserve, value, and enhance, helping to sustain energy, resources and ways of being.

As we go about our work as art educators and artists, perhaps 2026 can be the year we examine our current attitude to extractive and non-

extractive practices as they relate to teaching, learning and the visual arts. Let's think expansively and become aware of where we might be guilty of perpetuating the myth that extractive processes *are the only way*. Once we become aware, we can then start to use our creativity to make small (or large) changes to our day-to-day practices, which enable the ecosystems in which we operate to function with kindness, energy and sustainability.

AccessArt will be returning to these themes of course, but for now, a few gentle questions to help us start examining our attitudes to extractive / non-extractive practices as teacher, learner and artist. Some of these questions are deliberately tangled to encourage divergent thinking. They are not intended to be used as tools with which to punish ourselves. Instead, enjoy them as challenges to explore. New approaches - new energy.

Physical

- Where do the materials you use come from? How do you navigate the balance between providing enough materials to aid exploration without encouraging waste? How do the things you make exist in the world? What is material value? How much do you talk about these issues with other makers/learners?

Cultural

- How do you relate to the images and ideas you come across from other cultures? How much do you understand and respect the starting points/legacy which created these works? What does “borrowing” look like for you? Does it feel ok?
- How much do you impose on others? Are there ways you could create space for the cultural experiences of those you work with to be seen and heard?

Creative Process

- Is our creativity endless? Is it cyclical? What does creative rest look like? How do we value intention? Do we need to measure? What does respect to ourselves as creative beings look like?

Enjoy the new year. Gently does it.

Paula Briggs, January 2026

This is a sample of a resource created by UK Charity AccessArt. We have over 1500 resources to help develop and inspire

your creative thinking, practice and teaching.

AccessArt welcomes artists, educators, teachers and parents both in the UK and overseas.

We believe everyone has the right to be creative and by working together and sharing ideas we can enable everyone to reach their creative potential.

Destroying to Create

Making Tips & Tricks: Working with Tissue Paper & PVA Glue

Engaging Audiences Through

Transportation

Making a Ruler Drawing (of a Bag)

“Acts of Kindness” Workshop

“Everyone has the right to freedom of expression”

Why We Need Artist Educators To Take Centre Stage

How Tiny Art Schools Grow

Can Labour Show It Really Understands The Power Of The Arts To Transform Lives?

The Current Education System: Too Much Beta, Not Enough Alpha

Oak National Academy & The Art & Design Curriculum

During 2022 and 2023 AccessArt attended consultations organised by Oak National Academy to explore the potential for relaunching Oak after

its initial creation during the pandemic. Like many educational publishers, we were concerned at the time about both the nature and quality of the resources created, the ethics of the creation of a curriculum by government, and also the potential impact of a so called “free” curriculum on commercial and charitable educational suppliers.

First, a little history about AccessArt. We are [25 years old](#) this year, and we are proud to say that for the last few years we have become a [self-supporting arts organisation](#), requiring no funding from outside sources. We are in this fortunate position because our (many thousands of) [members](#) pay a small subscription fee to access all our resources. In turn, this allows us to create new resources for our community, and most importantly, remain true to our vision and integrity. The insight, intelligence and pragmatic nature of our offering to schools means that we are privileged to help thousands of teachers inspire hundreds of thousands of pupils. This is no more in evidence than in the creation of the [AccessArt Primary Art Curriculum](#). When we planned and created our curriculum, we were brave, followed our instinct and experience, and made certain that alongside the curriculum ethos and resources we created a support system and network to enable teachers to become enthusiastic, knowledgeable and confident art facilitators. The success of the curriculum has been recognised, with schools and Trusts recommending the flexible and empowering scheme to

their colleagues. Our real pride though, is that artists, designers and craftspeople recognise the curriculum as being robust, exciting and rich – exactly the kind of experience they appreciate and value as artists.

So you can image we are justifiably proud of our achievement. We are now busy at work on our [Key Stage 3 pathways](#), and beyond into adult and community education. Our vision is true, our team and trustees incredible, and our business model as a membership charity is strong.

In 2023 AccessArt was approached by Oak National Academy to explore partnership working in the creation of new curriculum resources, and later the same year I was approached to join the Expert Group. We turned both opportunities down. Here's why.

There is currently a [Judicial Review](#) brought about by three claimants: The British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA), the Publishers Association, and the Society of Authors. This is also supported by the National Education Union who are participating as an “interested party”.

“The government’s plans for Oak will be an unprecedented and unevidenced intervention that will cause irreparable damage to the education sector as we know it. The government is in effect creating a one-size-fits-all state publisher that promotes a single curriculum, controlled by the

Education Secretary of the day. This will undo years of work by publishers who have invested expertise over many decades in creating a rich range of world-leading resources for school children across the country.

“There is simply too much at stake to let these plans proceed unopposed. The potential impact on teacher autonomy, learner outcomes, and curriculum diversity and quality is too significant. That is why authors, publishers, educational suppliers, school groups, teachers’ unions, and others have all voiced strong concern over these plans.” [Dan Conway, CEO of the Publishers Association](#)

“If we don’t act now, educators will be left with one set of state approved online resources which will threaten diversity and choice, remove financial incentives, and damage the healthy competition which is at the heart of educational publishing. The result will likely be a weaker overall pool of resources, greater challenges for teachers, and a negative impact on students’ learning.” [Nicola Solomon, Chief Executive of the Society of Authors](#)

“Converting Oak from an emergency response to Covid to a permanent part of government is a decision with ominous implications. Without consultation or parliamentary debate, the government has taken a long stride towards directing the detail of teachers’ work. Unless its actions are challenged, what is now presented as

an optional resource will soon become the norm in schools. The government should recognise its limits: it does not have the capacity, the imagination and the understanding to intervene in this way.” [Kevin Courtney, Joint Gen Sec, NEU.](#)

The concerns echoed by the case brought to Judicial review, are echoed by the National Education Union. [Key NEU concerns:](#)

Claims that OAK is “by and for teachers” and “operationally independent” of Government misrepresent its true nature: OAK is under the ultimate control of ministers. Its resources are produced by a range of organisations by way of a commercial tendering process.

The Government’s business case for Oak is clear that it will be “continuously strategically aligned with Government policy as it develops over time”.

OAK’s status means there is a risk its materials will be seen as Government approved and “safe”.

This will increase pressure for schools to use their products, particularly given the pressures that Ofsted exerts, and its current focus on curriculum

Examples of how OAK is aligned with Ofsted include:

Each of the “Subject Expert Panels” set up to advise on the production of Oak materials includes an Ofsted Inspector

The Government’s business case for the OAK ALB acknowledged that Ofsted’s overall emphasis, since 2019, on the curriculum within school inspections “may...be influential in shaping and accelerating the uptake of [Oak’s] service.”

[Read the Full NEU Statement here.](#)

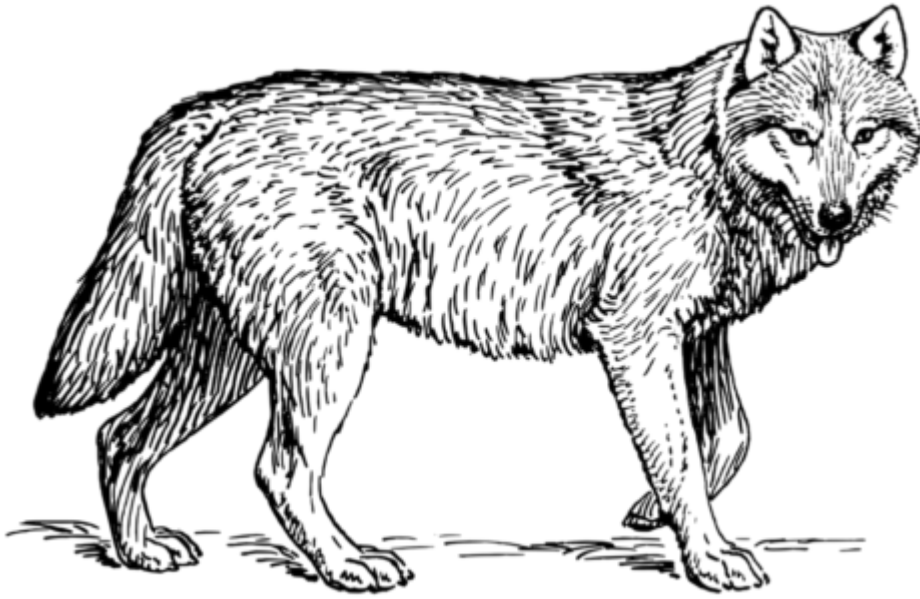
We believe Oak is a flawed and dangerous idea, and we are not alone. We believe that whilst Oak attempts to involve experts in its creation, the mechanisms and ethos behind creation of resources will ultimately restrict and control. And let's remember that whilst Oak touts itself as being "free", it does in fact cost money which the government could choose to spend in wiser ways to value teachers, build knowledge and seek real vision. Those original consultations we attended? We see no evidence of listening to what we heard during those sessions, and in many other education roundtables, as a no thank you to Oak National Academy.

As a Subject Association and charitable organisation which has worked long and hard to develop expertise which develops and enables our community of users to feel supported, inspired and empowered, AccessArt will continue to work independently through our principles and practice to support our members. We thank you for your continued support and understanding about what's really important in art education.

Paula Briggs, CEO & Creative Director AccessArt,
April 2024

Explore...

Taking Control of the narrative



“I realised through conversations with school leavers that they could no longer use words like intuition, entitlement, dreaming, invention, play. These words are unfamiliar to them, and they no longer resonate. These words, and therefore the ways of being they describe, are not available to them right now.”

Read why we need to change the narrative and speak with more courage about the purpose of education...

Not just ideas: Action Too



“One cold, rainy morning in January 1999, I received a phone call from the then DfES. The woman started the call with the words: “What is the best news someone could call you with on such a rainy January day?””

Explore and understand all that AccessArt has achieved and the impact we are making

The AccessArt Primary Art Curriculum – Impact & Evidence Autumn 2023

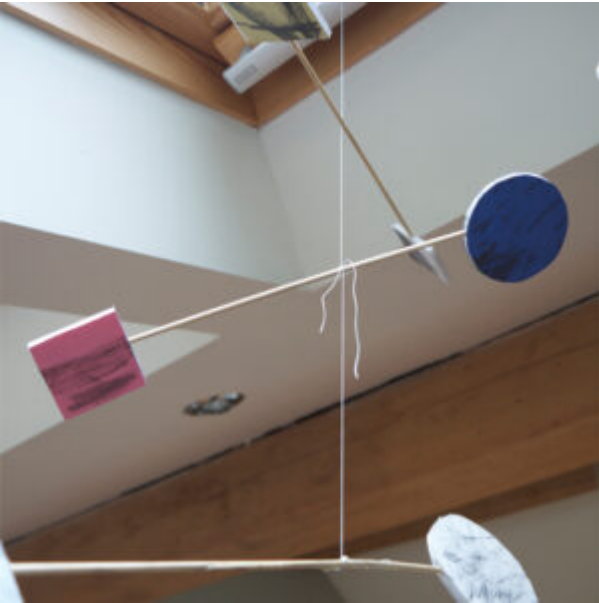
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