

Engaging Audiences Through Transportation

By [Paula Briggs](#)

The “Engaging Audiences Through Transportation” workshop at the [AccessArt Lab](#) aimed to bring together artists and teachers to explore how we can help inspire and engage learners by manipulating the learning environment itself. Thank you to all those who attended the session – it felt extremely positive and energetic!



The Thinking Behind the Session...

So many of our children's learning experiences are relatively unsensory. When we engage with art – making, looking and talking – it is usually a sensory experience. Most definitely the senses which are ignited as part of the process help us connect with our emotions, feelings and thoughts. So I wanted to explore, with the help of teachers and artists, how far we (the facilitators) can go to help meeting the learning in accessing art in a sensory way by creating a space which is primed to

stimulate the senses...

This goes beyond a traditional approach of an art lesson in which the facilitator “sets up” the room before the activity – making sure there is access to tools and materials, to subject matter etc etc. Here we are thinking instead about curating a space for the learners to discover – which begins the process of transportation (or engagement, or escapism, or imagination) which ultimately helps the learners access their own creativity.

It seems to me a generous act, that the facilitator thinks carefully about how to curate a space in which the learners might be best placed to act. It takes time, attention to detail, access to materials, your own creativity and imagination – to create a temporary environment which is specifically honed to the activity in question. It is the opposite of “bland” or “vanilla” or “classroom”. Instead, the question for the facilitator might be: “how can I use materials, furniture, sound, and space to create an environment which will delight, or challenge, and stimulate curiosity and conversation?”



Other Thoughts...

Any workshop session is always an opportunity to layer experiences upon experiences. Another aspect I wanted us to explore in this session was how, as part of the challenge to make, we can give permission to participants (whether artists and teachers or the learners themselves) to take what they need. This sounds glib, or even undesirable, but I wanted us to be able to acknowledge that to

be creative, we need to be brave to take what we need, and to put unlikely things together, without any kind of guarantee of outcome. To take what we need, to destroy before we create, and to explore free from fear of “success” is vital if we are to explore creative potential.



The Warm-Up...

We began with a visualisation. I asked

participants to stand (bravely!) in a circle, facing outwards so no-one felt “watched.” As they stood, I asked them to first imagine, and then to act out, that they were reaching their arms out, one at a time, to take un-named “things” out of the air, pulling them towards their body. I asked them to explore “taking” these things from different parts of the space around them – much like you’d pluck an apple from a tree. As they did this, I asked them to purposely not name or even imagine what these things were – I didn’t want them to limit or second guess what they wanted or needed. Instead to imagine the vastness of what they *could* take... Perhaps they were gathering tangible things – like materials, or sounds, or objects, or elements, or even ways of being...

I explained that I wanted them to give themselves permission to take what was needed – even without knowing what was needed (that would come through exploration). To recognise that we have this whole world out there, and as creative beings we can take elements from anywhere, bring them to us without knowing why, and sit with them before using them to create.

Ultimately, we need our children and young people to understand they are empowered to act and to create. The action must start with them – they are responsible for their actions – we give them permission and help them understand the space in which they act. If they remain disempowered, they

will not thrive.

The Set Up:



My “gesture” for transporting the artists and teachers was to fill the room full of yellow. I had been feeling like there was a lot of tiredness in the people I met (generally – not the participants!), and a lot of fear and worry. Yellow is the colour of energy and optimism, so my urge was to give participants an abundance of yellow – rich not just with the colour but also with its materiality.



The materials were presented on the table with participants working facing inwards so that there was a sense of community and shared aim.



The Invitation:

I invited the participants to explore the materials in front of them, to absorb their yellow materiality. I reminded them they were able to be active – to walk about with curiosity. To go and look and find, not just to accept the materials immediately in front of them. This investigatory curiosity is key to creativity.

I invited them to begin to make in one of two ways (which in effect are the same – but offering the two ways of saying the same thing might appeal to different people):

- *Collect and Curate, or*
- *Make a Creative Response.*

I encouraged them to do nothing more than try to follow their instinct, and let one thing lead to another. The only criteria was to transform “yellow”, into “my yellow”.

I reminded them again “they had permission.” They could (and should) feel able to destroy before they create. For example, feel able to cut the tape measure, feel able to snip the fabric. Of course, as facilitator you will have your own boundaries around the materials you supply, and you should be clear about these. But it is important we enable learners to act responsibly by giving them trust and permission to act. Art is a safe space in which to learn these skills, and to

learn to make proactive decisions which are also prosocial and positive.

After 45 minutes, the participants shared their responses.

















The Collaborative Task...

Next, I invited participants to work in pairs and to collaborate to brainstorm, through making, a small maquette (model) of a space which they thought would be transportational to the learners in their experience. I emphasised that these

should be aspirational, imagination and ultimately unrealistic, but that these would give us the opportunity to talk about what might be possible, or might be helpful, in understanding how best we might engage our learners.

Thank you once again to the artists and teachers who took part. Please do post any comments below, thank you.









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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.

“Everyone has the right to freedom of expression”

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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

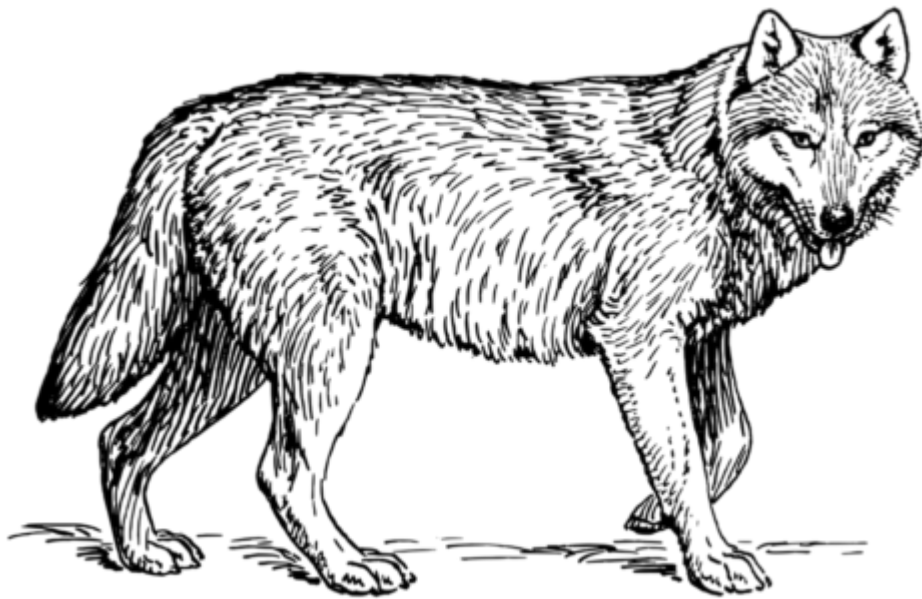
mechanisms and ethos behind creation of resources will ultimately restrict and control. And let's remember that whilst Oak touts itself as being "free", it does in fact cost money which the government could choose to spend in wiser ways to value teachers, build knowledge and seek real vision. Those original 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...

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“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?””

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