



RSA

Action and Research Centre

Learning About Culture

Programme Prospectus

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Introduction

Learning About Culture is a two-and-a-half year investigation into the role that cultural learning plays in improving educational outcomes for children. Its intention is to develop more evidence of what works and support schools and cultural organisations to use that evidence, as well as evidence from their own work and elsewhere, to continuously improve their practice. At the centre of the programme is a partnership between The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to deliver the UK's largest ever study of cultural learning.¹ The RSA's research and engagement will go beyond that study, working with partners in the cultural and education sectors to build a commitment to self-improvement as strong as the commitment to ensuring access.

The programme has two key aims.

Aim 1: Build a stronger evidence base for cultural learning

Work strand 1: Randomised controlled trials – evidence of impact and the approaches that deliver it

8,500 children in 400 state schools with a significant proportion of pupil premium-eligible students will participate in trials of five cultural learning activities, starting in September 2018. These trials represent the biggest study of its kind ever undertaken in the UK and will provide much-needed insight into both what works and how it works.

The projects selected for the trials all have some initial evidence indicating their potential to improve outcomes for learners, but they have not yet been evaluated to demonstrate a causal relationship with those improvements. Independent evaluations of the five projects will provide detailed, robust evidence of:

- The difference these activities make to children's academic achievement;
- The difference they make to children's development of 'non-cognitive' skills – sometimes called soft skills or character development and including e.g. motivation, confidence, empathy;
- How different projects are implemented effectively in order to achieve success;
- How engaging in activity with cultural providers helps develop schools' arts and cultural offer.

Results of the trials will be published by the EEF, contributing to the Toolkit of Research,³ which allows school leaders to see how much additional progress these projects help students make, how much they cost per pupil and how reliable the evidence is.

Work strand 2: Understanding the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of cultural learning activities

The RSA will conduct follow-up research with those schools participating in the trials that benefited the most and the least, to develop an understanding of the contextual factors that influenced those outcomes. Together with the impact data from the trials, this information will allow the RSA to make some meaningful, practical recommendations that will help improve policy and practice across the cultural learning sector.

Parallel to the trials, the RSA will conduct deep-dive research in schools that attribute a range of successful learner outcomes to the use of cultural learning activity. We will take a critical best practice⁴ approach to learn from the analysis of detailed examples of how schools and cultural partners use cultural learning to achieve a range of learner outcomes. Critical best practice allows us to avoid a deficit approach; instead, seeking out success and celebrating the achievements of skilled practitioners.

Aim 2: Improve the use of evidence in cultural learning

The RSA will collaborate with schools, arts and cultural organisations and funders to build on existing good practice and improve practitioner effectiveness in collecting, understanding and using evidence. Here, a useful parallel is the distinction between summative and formative assessment. Our purposes are formative – we want to help schools and cultural organisations improve their use of evidence about what works, not for external validation, but for themselves. Not to justify the presence of the arts in school, but to inform how it happens. Not to ‘prove’ but to ‘improve’.

Work strand 3: Research and engagement on use of evidence in cultural learning

- Creating a research and evidence competency framework for cultural learning practitioners and schools. This tool will focus on building practitioner agency and autonomy: building personal capacities to learn from and respond to evidence derived from one’s own practice and from elsewhere.
- Collaborating with Arts Council England (ACE), corporate and charitable funders to explore how these strategic agencies can support improved use of evidence.
- Developing, with the ACE Bridge Organisations, regional networks of practitioners who will develop skills in the use of evidence. These practitioners will become evidence champions in their regions. Similarly, we will create a network of school governors with a dedicated focus on evidence-informed practice in cultural learning, to create a replicable model that might be used in any school.
- Publishing accessible summaries of evidence from the trials, to ensure that research findings can inform practice. These reports will seek to disaggregate elements of different successful approaches that are transferable to a wide range of practice.
- Looking at how other sectors have improved their use of evidence and produced improved outcomes for beneficiaries, in order to make recommendations to the cultural learning sector. This will include investigating possibilities for stronger networks for professional association across different art forms.



Background

If you don't have access, you are the object rather than the subject of culture.⁵

Fintan O'Toole

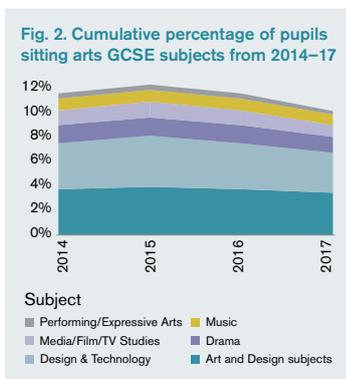
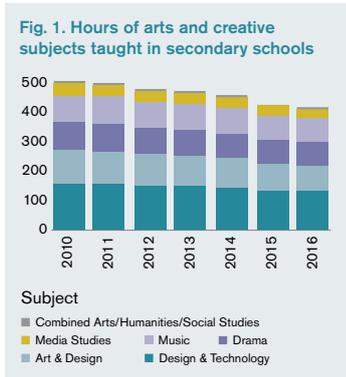
An entitlement to participation in culture goes beyond a right to self-expression – it is a fundamental component of a just society; one that ensures that everyone can contribute to how we understand one another. School is the place where many children get most of their education about arts and culture – as creators, audiences or a blend of the two. However, in recent years there has been a decline in the provision of arts and cultural education in England's schools. The RSA's work in education seeks to empower schools to avoid any pressure to narrow or hollow-out their offer, while maintaining their commitment to improving outcomes for children. Learning About Culture seeks to make sure that schools and their cultural sector partners have the best information available to help them continue to provide and improve their cultural learning provision.

Using evidence to improve rather than prove effectiveness.

Over the next two years the RSA, in partnership with the EEF, will investigate the different ways in which arts and cultural learning benefits children's education; how it helps to improve attainment as well as social and emotional learning. We aim to provide much-needed, robust evidence of the additional progress that cultural learning activities enable children to make and how they make this happen. In investigating the contribution that cultural learning can make to attainment and to those aspects of psycho-social development which support improved attainment, we are not trying to define arts education as simply another literacy, numeracy or science pedagogy. Learning About Culture will investigate the wide range of benefits that schools and students derive from cultural learning and the breadth of ways in which practitioners are evaluating their impact.

Our belief is that by strengthening the evidence base for 'what works' and improving cultural learning practitioners' and schools' use of evidence, we can improve the status, quality and long-term sustainability of the arts in our schools. Working with education and cultural sectors, the RSA is addressing the challenge that for too long, evidence of impact has been understood as a tool to advocate for continued provision rather than to increase the benefits that provision might provide. We will work with the sector to ensure that new and existing evidence of what works finds its way into more schools and more programmes of work and ultimately helps make a shift to using evidence to *improve* rather than *prove* effectiveness.

The Challenge



Participation in school is critical to fulfilling children’s entitlement to arts and culture, with many young people only getting access to cultural learning activities such as music and theatre during school hours. 55 percent of the 11–15 year olds going to the theatre, 46.2 percent of those doing art and craft activities and 43 percent of those accessing music activities are only getting the opportunity to do so in school.⁶ However, Department for Education (DfE) data shows a persistent, ongoing decline in the number of specialist arts teachers and hours spent learning arts subjects in secondary schools. In 2016, there were 19 percent fewer teachers of arts and creative subjects and 18 percent less time was spent on them than in 2010.⁷ A recent report from the Education Policy Institute on exam entries in arts subjects at KS4 shows a decline over the last two years and that the entry rate in 2016 was the lowest of the last 10 years.⁸ Data from the National Society for Education in Art and Design suggests a decline in the time primary schools are allocating to art.⁹

In this context, it’s not surprising that many practitioners involved in cultural learning and their advocates assert that the value of arts and cultural learning goes beyond its intrinsic benefits and that it influences children’s academic achievement, either directly or indirectly by boosting communication skills and confidence.

Why we need to build a stronger evidence base for cultural learning

Better evidence of a causal connection between cultural learning and improved student outcomes may make it more likely that schools choose to provide an arts- and culture-rich education. Better evidence of what approaches lead to different outcomes will help schools to become more effective commissioners of cultural learning and inform the design of more effective projects. Evaluating projects at a scale sufficient to provide reliable evidence is outside the financial and operational capacity of most arts and cultural learning project developers. Learning About Culture will seek to fill this gap, by evaluating cultural learning projects that are designed to improve pupil outcomes.

The idea that one-off interventions and projects are less likely to produce effects than ongoing provision of arts and cultural learning across multiple phases of education is widely accepted.¹⁰ However, given that many stand-alone cultural learning projects are offered to schools regardless of what other provision schools offer, detailed information about how those projects work, regardless of context, will be useful for improving effective practice.

The cultural learning sector is incredibly diverse and the distinctiveness of different practitioners, artists and organisations is an important part of why schools want to work with them. Evidence that can lead to improved provision must not serve to homogenise or be reductive, rather it should identify beneficial approaches that are transferable across different cultural learning practice.

Unfortunately, the evidence for the contribution that arts and cultural interventions make to raising attainment is too weak to be convincing. Large scale reviews of academic research from across the globe conducted by the OECD¹¹ and the EEF¹² revealed both a lack of robust evidence for the impact

on attainment in literacy and numeracy and limited rigorous research into impact on ‘non-cognitive’ skill development or attainment within specialist subject study. If the arts are to be taught as a means to boost academic achievement then teachers and schools need to know whether that aim is actually being delivered. This is especially important for those schools using their pupil premium funding – public money intended to help disadvantaged pupils to catch up with their peers – to pay for arts activities. While improving attainment isn’t the only reason schools engage in arts and cultural activity, it is a strong motivating factor for all their decisions. In an increasingly evidence-hungry education system, lack of evidence could contribute to a further weakening of schools’ cultural provision, especially for the most disadvantaged pupils.

Thinking like a system, empowering individuals

The RSA’s developing model for social change argues that isolated efforts don’t lead to success. There are however, signs of growing cross-sectoral acceptance that evidence of impact on learning is essential to long term sustainability and improvement. Some of these are led by strategic development organisations and funders, but others (like the fledgling Creative Writing with Children network and the Acts of Translation roundtables at Tate¹³) are being led by practitioners, indicating grassroots ownership of the issue. The Bridge Organisations and the developing network of local Cultural Education Partnerships provide a valuable infrastructure for peer-support towards practical change. We know that evidence of impact is important to the sustainability of cultural organisations: 70 percent of arts and culture organisations responding to the Cultural Commissioning Programme survey said that “being able to evidence” their projects was one of the three most important factors in securing funding.¹⁴ The RSA’s recent survey of cultural learning organisations suggested that 80 percent are doing more evaluation of their work than five years ago, 72 percent because they ‘wanted to know the difference [their] projects were making’.¹⁵

We see other important shifts in the education system: Ofsted’s recently-appointed Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, has announced a review of curriculum narrowing and is openly critical of the trend wherein “exams have come to replace the education, rather than merely measuring it”.¹⁶ At the launch of the New Schools Network report on the impact of the EBacc and declining GCSE entries in creative subjects,¹⁷ it was duly noted that the DfE and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) shared a platform to declare a mutual interest in maintaining a strong arts and cultural education.

There are ongoing improvements in our understanding of the malleability of non-cognitive skills and their importance in relation to improved educational outcomes for children.¹⁸ This has encouraged an expanded focus for the EEF (whose Toolkit is an essential reference point for school leaders designing pupil premium strategies) to understand the value of ‘essential life skills’ and to evaluate *how* successful interventions work as well as whether or not they do.

The RSA’s role as independent from and supportive to both the arts and education, helps us to ensure that the evidence produced by this programme can inform and enrich practice in cultural learning. In partnership with the EEF, we are working with DCMS, ACE, the network of Bridge Organisations,

Cultural learning practitioners can... use the creativity that is the lifeblood of their work to develop innovative evaluative approaches.

charitable and corporate funders of cultural learning, schools, and practitioners, not only to uncover evidence of what works, but to make sure that it can translate into practice that enables individual organisations and practitioners to improve outcomes for children.

Why we need to improve the use of evidence in cultural learning

Having evidence isn't the same thing as knowing what it's useful for or how to use it to inform programme design decisions. Evidence and evaluation serves three key functions for any organisation wishing to measure its impact:

- Accountability – knowing how well I am doing (against agreed criteria)
- Improvement – understanding how I can improve
- Advocacy – demonstrating my success and persuading others of the importance of my work.

With the decline in schools' arts provision, the cultural learning sector has prioritised the third of these functions. The Culture and Sport Evidence Programme,¹⁹ ACE Cultural Value report²⁰ and Cultural Learning Alliance's (CLA) ImagineNation²¹ for example, all use evidence of the contribution of arts activity to pupil outcomes to advocate for continued provision in school and more enthusiastic support from education policy-makers. All have been welcomed by a sector that perceives itself to be vulnerable. On the other hand, when reports like the EEF's systematic review²² reveal a lack of strong evidence, they are perceived as anti-advocacy, and criticism is levelled at their failure to include those (discontinued) projects that did lead to improved outcomes, as if the point was to prove once-and-for-all that cultural learning 'works'.

The cultural learning sector needs to refocus its attentions onto the use of evidence to improve rather than to prove its effectiveness, or, as Caroline Sharp, of the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) puts it: "to see evidence and evaluation as being for *them*, rather than primarily for *others*. Evidence that cultural learning can improve outcomes is not the same thing as a guarantee that it will. A focus on improving rather than proving effectiveness as part of an external accountability system would demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement, including partnering with schools to achieve their objectives around improving outcomes for children".²³

Achieving this aim requires whole system action, with cultural organisations, schools and funders all having roles to play in improving how practice learns from experience to improve effectiveness. It also requires individual practitioners and organisations to become more skilled and more judicious in their use of evidence from elsewhere and more precise in their collection of evidence of their own impact. Whether or not external evaluation support is involved, bringing evaluation in-house develops skills and a stronger sense of ownership that is more likely to see it influence practice.²⁴

Research themes

The scope of the RSA's research goes beyond evidence for impact on learning outcomes and will investigate a broader range of questions.

1

Innovation

How new activities, projects and programmes are developed

- What drives innovation in cultural learning and what mechanisms are in place to support it?
- What are the tensions between artistic innovation and educational innovation and how can they be resolved?
- How can successful cultural learning activities be scaled up and still honour the importance of diverse and distinctive artistic practice?

2

Evaluation

How effectiveness is understood and assessed

- What range of outcomes are schools and arts organisations interested in achieving?
- Where are cultural learning activities having success and how do schools and practitioners evaluate it?
- How is evidence from evaluation being used to improve practice, both at organisational level and across the sector?

3

Sector development

How to strengthen self-governance of standards and practice

- How well is cultural learning understood among parents, school leaders and policy makers?
- How have other sectors transformed their approaches to using evidence to improve practice? What can cultural learning learn from elsewhere?
- Is there a need for stronger, cross-sectoral association and how might existing strategic infrastructure support it?

The Cultural Learning Fund

Who applied to take part in the trials?

In January and February 2017, arts and cultural organisations, schools, Higher Education Institutions, local authorities and others were invited to apply to take part in the trials. In total, we received 92 applications from a wide range of organisations. Any art form or cultural activity was eligible. We were explicit in encouraging applications for activities that were highlighted as promising or in need of more robust studies in the EEF review of arts education,²⁵ but all proposals were judged on their own merits. The RSA, the EEF and ACE all contributed to the selection process: shortlisting applications, before engaging applicants in structured phone interviews and conducting financial due diligence checks. Projects were selected based on fit with the goal to provide evidence of impact on learning outcomes, developers' use of pre-existing evidence in the project design and their own collection of evidence of impact on children's attainment and personal development to date.

Fig. 3. Cultural focus

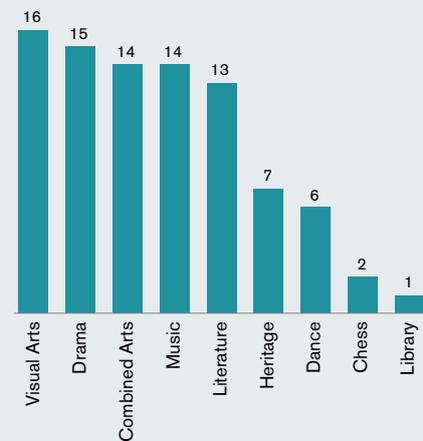


Fig. 4. Key stages that applicants proposed to work with

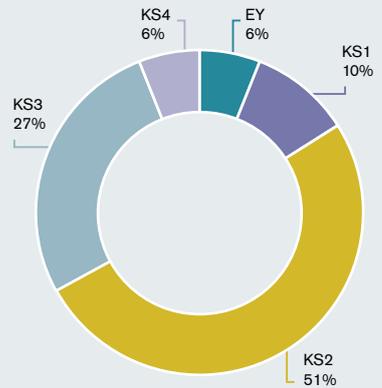


Fig. 5. Applicant location

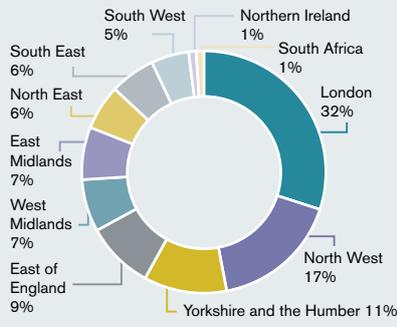
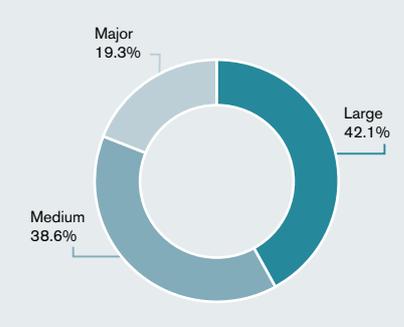


Fig. 6. Organisation size



The Cultural Learning Fund projects

The Power of Pictures

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

The project

Specialist training from published author-illustrators and the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) expert teachers helps primary teachers to develop their understanding of the craft of picture book creation as a way of raising children's achievement in literacy. Teachers attend training days where they work directly with author-illustrators and learn related techniques to use in their own teaching e.g. creating characters by first drawing and discussing them. This leads to the development of richer and more sophisticated characters, which improves the quality of pupils' writing. Teachers are provided with teaching sequences, a copy of the author's book, and extensive online resources, including author interviews.

After the training days, the author-illustrator works directly with students, providing a memorable and exciting opportunity for them. In addition, a member of staff from CLPE accompanies the author-illustrator so that they can help to troubleshoot or coach the teacher in using the techniques. CLPE are a nationally recognised provider of literacy courses and resources and much of their work has a distinctive cultural dimension.

Existing evidence for impact

Beginning in 2014, the programme was developed with funding from the Arts Council and has been through 10 cycles, each involving a different author-illustrator. The evidence for the specific project is limited, but the programme is based on many well-evidenced principles. For example, there is extensive evidence indicating the promise of explicitly teaching pupils about the writing process and about the structure of stories. The project also involves the use of illustration to improve comprehension, which is recognised as an essential for reading development and well-supported by evidence.

Project characteristics			
Age range	KS2 – Year 5	Primary outcome	Writing
Number of schools	120 (1,800 pupils)	Other outcomes	Confidence Motivation
Delivery location	England-wide	Cultural form/s	Creative writing, drawing (illustration)

Schools interested to participate in this trial should visit: www.clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures

The Craft of Writing

Arvon, University of Exeter and The Open University

The project

Teachers work with professional writers to develop their own writing over two weekend residential stays. The residencies aim to develop teachers' confidence and identities as writers, and, by working closely with professional writers, to develop understanding of the craft of writing. Between the residential stays, teachers attend three professional development days that help them apply their learning about writing to their own teaching, in order to improve children's writing skills and motivation to write. Arvon, which has extensive experience of providing writing retreats with professional writers, will lead the project. They will do this in partnership with Professors Debra Myhill and Teresa Cremin, who are internationally recognised as experts in research about writing.

Existing evidence for impact

The current programme builds on an Arts Council-funded 'Teachers as Writers' research project. Early results suggest that although teachers have developed their confidence and identities as writers, leading to markedly increased *motivation* towards writing amongst students, it has not improved student attainment. In response, the programme has been adapted to include three CPD days, which will develop more explicit understanding of the craft of writing and will support teachers in transferring that learning to the classroom with the goal of improving written outcomes.

The writing techniques, or strategies, that teachers will learn and the new craft of writing framework that teachers will use bear some similarity to those used in an earlier EEF trial that found a promising result.²⁶ There is extensive evidence showing the impact of using writing composition strategies and the approach is included in the EEF's primary literacy guidance reports.²⁷

Project characteristics			
Age range	KS2 – Year 5	Primary outcome	Writing
Number of schools	96 (2,880 pupils)	Other outcomes	Motivation
Delivery location	North of England	Cultural form/s	Creative writing

Schools interested to participate in this trial should visit: <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/research/centres/centreforresearchinwriting/projects/craftofwriting>

Speech Bubbles

London Bubble

The project

Drama practitioners and teaching assistants to deliver weekly drama sessions aimed at improving communication skills of pupils where this has been identified as a challenge to their success in the classroom. Pupils are placed at the centre of the activity, and working in groups of 10, they become, at different times, author, performer and audience. Parents and carers join two sessions, taking part in the activity.

Teaching assistants attend an initial training day with their drama practitioner, and then a second half-day halfway through the project. After each session, the teaching assistant and drama practitioner reflect on the session and co-plan the activities for the following week.

Project characteristics			
Age range	KS1	Primary outcome	Reading
Number of schools	25 (500 pupils)	Other outcomes	Storytelling and narrative complexity Social skills
Delivery location	London and Manchester	Cultural form/s	Drama

Schools interested to participate in this trial should visit: www.londonbubble.org.uk/projectpage/speech-bubbles

The Young Journalist Academy

Paradigm Arts

The project

Each participating class begins by setting up a 'newsroom' and pupils are invited to apply for specific roles through a written application and a formal interview. Up to 15 pupils take on editorial roles, but all pupils are involved in writing newspaper articles, radio production and filmmaking. Throughout the year children publish content, providing an authentic purpose and audience for writing and encouraging pupils to share, revise and edit their work.

Over the course of a year, two journalists come to the school eight times to work alongside pupils and teachers in leading the project.

Project characteristics			
Age range	KS2 – Year 5	Primary outcome	Writing
Number of schools	100 (3,000 pupils)	Other outcomes	Motivation Self-efficacy
Delivery location	England-wide	Cultural form/s	Digital content creation

Schools interested to participate in this trial should visit: www.paradigmarts.co.uk/yja

First Thing Music

Tees Valley Music Service

The project

The Kodály method offers a structured approach to music education. It is playful and physical, based on a carefully worked out sequential curriculum in which songs and musical games are used to teach the basics of music. It uses techniques such as signs, games, clapping, reading musical symbols and rhythmic notation, and most centrally, singing.

Teachers are trained to use the approach for 15 minutes every day (over three terms) with a whole class of pupils as a way of providing

Project characteristics			
Age range	KS1	Primary outcome	Reading
Number of schools	60 (1,800 pupils)	Other outcomes	Self-regulation
Delivery location	North-East England	Cultural form/s	Music

Schools interested to participate in this trial should visit: www.tvms.org.uk

Existing evidence for impact

An independent review of the Speech Bubbles approach indicated that it had promise to develop pupils' self-efficacy and communication skills. A comparison group study led by the University of East London suggested that in most cases, "the progress made lifted children's performance out of categories that would indicate cause for concern". The wider evidence from the EEF toolkit on oral language interventions shows consistently positive effects of on average +5 months additional progress over the course of a year. The impact tends to be greatest for younger children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. A number of studies also show the impact of trained teaching assistants effectively supporting oral language skills and reading outcomes.

The project is adapted to the context of each school through review and evaluation meetings with the teacher. Between visits by the journalists, teachers and pupils with editorial roles continue to engage with the project, sending new content to The Young Journalist Academy for publication on its popular website.

Existing evidence for impact

Running since 2008, with over 5,000 pupils, the project is based on some well-evidenced principles about writing, such as the importance of writing for purpose and audience, and the value of explicitly teaching pupils specific techniques or strategies to improve their writing composition.

a structured start to the school day. Tees Valley Music Service (the lead partner in the Music Education Hub for Teesside) will lead the project in association with the British Kodály Academy.

Existing evidence for impact

The EEF's Arts Education literature review²⁸ identified Kodály as an approach with some promise based on earlier studies. More broadly, the review also identified musical approaches with very young children as having some promise. The EEF's Early Years Teaching and Learning Toolkit indicates that aspects of the approach, such as the focus on communication and language, also have promise.²⁹



Evaluating the projects

Evaluation designs are tailored to each project's structure, content and focus as well as to the ages of the participating children. The project delivery organisations are involved in every stage of designing the evaluation process, working with the evaluator and alongside the RSA and the EEF to agree the best design. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to evaluation.

Understanding impact

A quantitative impact evaluation will assess the contribution each project makes to improving student outcomes. All the projects being trialled have been designed to improve attainment and non-cognitive development. Each project has a *primary outcome* related to academic achievement and *other outcomes* relating to the development of non-cognitive skills – a set of attitudes, behaviours, and strategies thought to underpin success in school and at work, such as motivation, perseverance, and self-control. Different tests will be used to assess progress in relation to those outcomes, selected for reliability, practicality, validity and resolution.

A qualitative evaluation of how the projects are implemented in the classroom will be used alongside the impact evaluation, to identify the challenges for delivery and the approaches that are leading to any identified benefits.

To make the process more consistent across all its trials, the EEF has worked with the University of Manchester to create SPECTRUM, a detailed framework for identifying appropriate and reliable measures of non-cognitive skills. This framework offers guidance to the independent evaluation team about the most appropriate tools to measure impact in various non-cognitive skills.³⁰ Across all five trials, we will assess the contribution these projects make to developing children's creativity. While there are different definitions of creativity, not all of which are pertinent to the projects being trialled, we are exploring the possibility of measuring their impact on children's ability to generate ideas and express them.

Randomised controlled trials

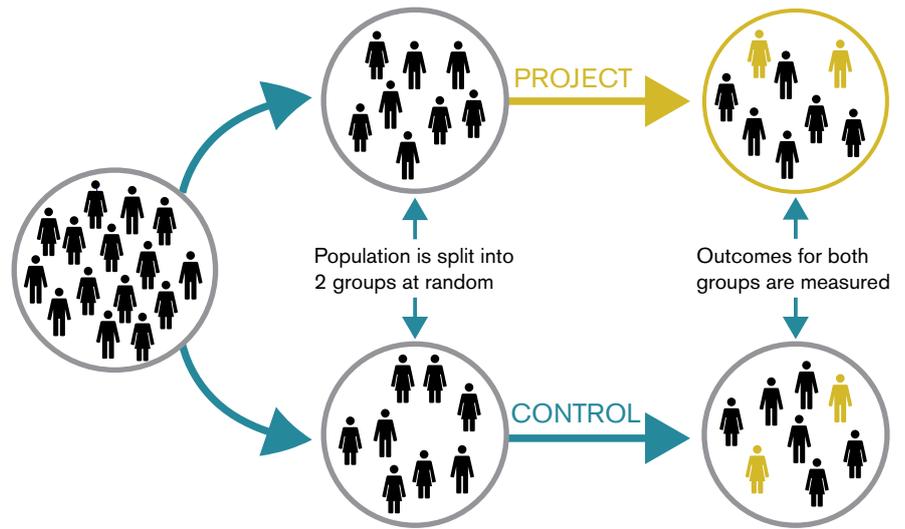
A project's impact is the difference between what *actually happened* to the students who participated and what *would have happened* to them had they not been part of the work. To estimate this we need to identify and track a comparison group of students who do not participate in the project, but are otherwise similar to the students who do participate.

The best way of doing this is by designing the evaluation as a randomised controlled trial (RCT). This involves randomly assigning, from a group of potential participants, which children and young people receive the treatment and which do not. RCTs give us the best chance of being able to distinguish the effects of the projects from the effectiveness of practitioners and the receptiveness of schools.

How a randomised control trial works

A population – in our case, schools interested to participate in one of the cultural learning projects – is divided in two, with half the group allocated to participate and the other half allocated to a ‘control’ group, which does not participate. At the end of the project, the outcomes we are interested to measure – for example, progress in literacy – are compared. In the diagrams below, the figures in gold demonstrate successful outcomes.

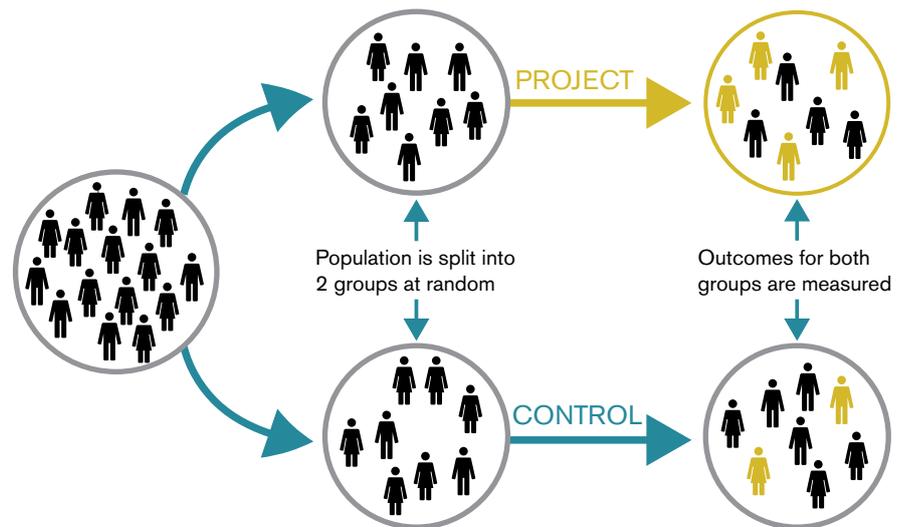
Fig. 7



There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to evaluation.

In Fig. 7, the project has only been as effective as whatever would have happened anyway. In Fig. 8, you can see an example of a trial where the intervention is improving outcomes relative to the control:

Fig. 8



Why the trials are working at such a large scale

We need to include enough participants (e.g. pupils, schools) in the projects to ensure we can be confident that we are observing real, rather than random, differences in outcomes. The bigger the sample, the more confident we can be with our estimates. Running the projects in many schools means we can be confident that the differences are caused by the intervention rather than the teachers or schools involved.

Who's conducting the evaluation?

The projects will be evaluated by independent evaluators, which means we can be confident that the test is as fair as possible. Following a tender process, a joint team comprising UCL Institute of Education (IOE) and the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) were selected to evaluate the projects.

The impact evaluation will be led by Jake Anders (Senior Research Associate, IOE) and Michael Sanders (Chief Scientist and Head of Research and Evaluation, BIT). Jake has contributed to a number of EEF-funded trials and is currently leading the review of the EEF's guidance for evaluation of complex whole-school interventions. Michael has authored BIT's paper on applying behavioural insights to education and has conducted more than 150 randomised controlled trials.

The Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) will be led by Jessica Heal (Head of Qualitative Research, BIT), who leads BIT's process evaluations and qualitative projects, specialising in sensitive research and working with vulnerable groups; and Dominic Wyse, Professor of Early Childhood and Primary Education at the IOE, and Head of the Department of Learning and Leadership. He is also an elected member of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Council. Professors Andrew Burn and Gemma Moss bring their extensive expertise in the evaluation of cultural learning projects to strengthen the design and interpretation of this work. In addition, Professor Emerita Sue Hallam will contribute her extensive knowledge especially in the field of music psychology on a pro bono basis.

The independent evaluators, along with EEF and the RSA, have spent a significant amount of time with the project delivery organisations to gain a deep understanding of the projects and their intended outcomes.

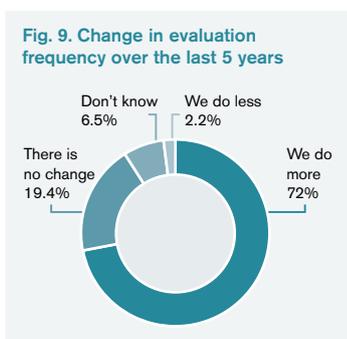
The evaluation design process

The independent evaluators, along with EEF and the RSA, have spent a significant amount of time with the project delivery organisations over the last four to five months to gain a deep understanding of the projects and their intended outcomes. Through this collaborative process, they have developed detailed logic models and identified appropriate evaluation tools for each project. A full description of the evaluation set-up process is available on the EEF website and a forthcoming series of RSA blogs will tell you more about the process and advise practitioners how they might replicate it to evaluate their own activities.

What do we know about how evidence is currently used in cultural learning?

Monitoring and evaluation, when accompanied by reflective practice, are powerful tools for continually improving projects and enabling organisations to tell powerful stories about the valuable work they do.³¹ To help us build a picture of how effectively this is happening in cultural learning, we analysed applications to the Cultural Learning Fund and the 107 responses to an RSA survey of cultural organisations working with schools in August–September 2017.

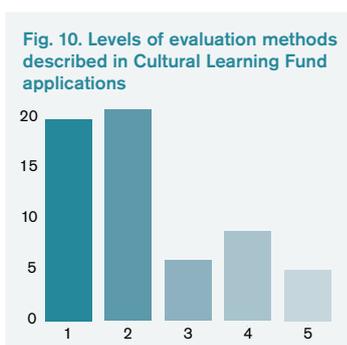
In the RSA survey,³² 72 percent of organisations said that they now do more monitoring and evaluation than five years ago (Fig. 9), reflecting a trend across the voluntary sector.³³



However, when we analysed the approaches to evaluation described in applications to the fund, we found that very few organisations met standards of evidence commonly used in the third sector, e.g. the Dartington Standards of Evidence³⁴ or the Nesta Standards of Evidence.³⁵ This echoes existing research that has found the cultural sector’s evaluation practices to be simpler than those of voluntary organisations³⁶ and a number of cultural learning evidence reviews – including from the OECD and the EEF – that have pointed to a paucity of rigorous evidence of impact on academic attainment and ‘non-cognitive’ outcomes for young people.³⁷

To get a clearer picture of what is happening, we created our own typology of evidence-gathering methods, with each level providing progressively more reliable evidence for impact:

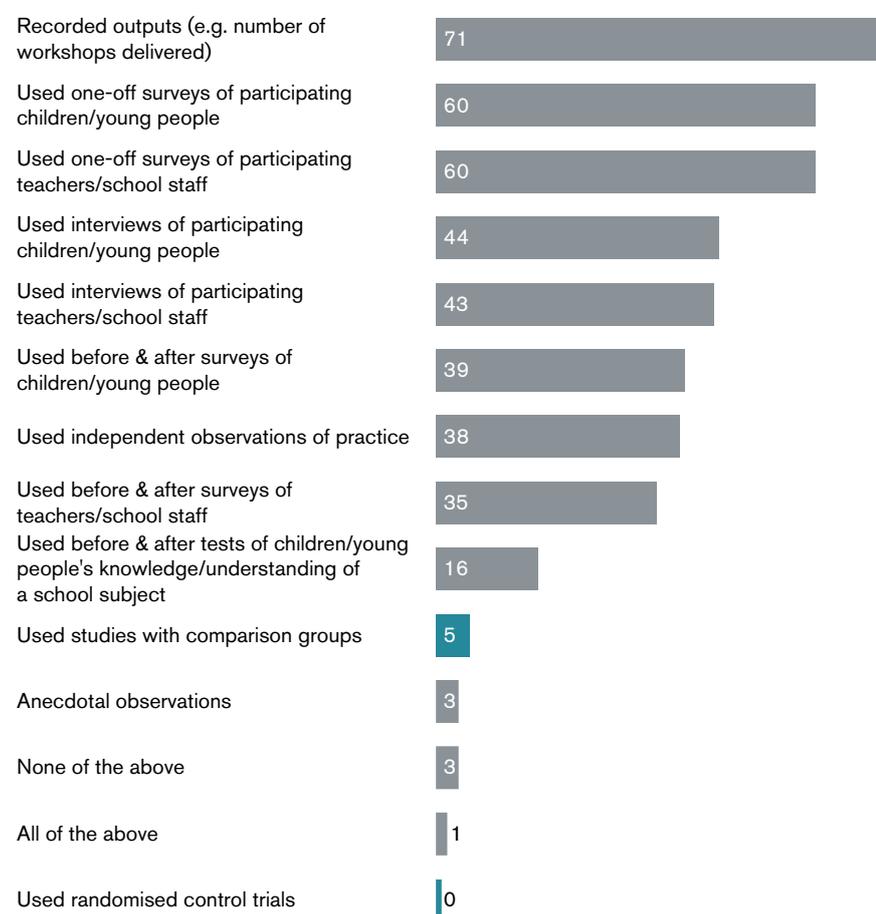
- Level 1: Anecdotal (endorsement quotes, personal observation etc.)
- Level 2: One-off surveys or interviews (of just one stakeholder group – usually pupils or teachers)
- Level 3: Before and after surveys or interviews (of just one stakeholder group)
- Level 4: Mixed methods with multiple stakeholder groups including a baseline (data collected before the intervention began)
- Level 5: Use of comparison groups or control trials.



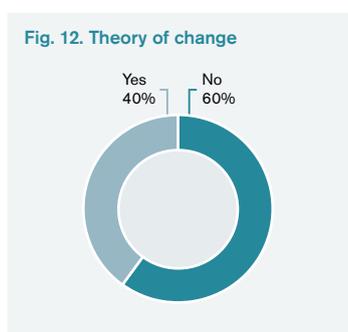
One question on the Cultural Learning Fund application form asked organisations for evidence that their project has an impact on academic and non-cognitive outcomes. Of the 89 organisations who responded to this question, 70 percent (n=62) provided some evidence from their project (Fig. 10). Of these, 67 percent (n=42) reached Levels 1 and 2 in our hierarchy (anecdotal or one-off survey evidence). Only 8 percent reached the highest standard:

Level 5 (they had developed a counterfactual, e.g. using a comparison group). These trends are broadly reflected in the RSA survey responses, in which we asked for more detailed information about evaluation methods (Fig. 11).

Fig. 11
Information collected in the last year



The organisations responding to the call for proposals to the Cultural Learning Fund believe that their projects contribute to a broad range of academic and non-academic outcomes (Table 1). However, our survey demonstrates that most cultural learning organisations do not have a theory in place about how their activities might lead to change (Fig. 12), and many lack the skills among their staff to use evaluation approaches that will demonstrate that their work achieves its intended outcomes.³⁸



This isn't to say that these projects don't make a difference in the ways they describe. However, there is a need to ensure that cultural learning organisations are equipped to describe how their model might lead to change, using a broad range of evaluation approaches; something that the aforementioned recent reviews have found lacking.

Of course there are reasons why cultural learning practitioners may find impact evaluation challenging. Some are true of all organisations that are required to report on the impact of their projects. As Dan Corry notes:

“...for many, the words ‘measurement’ and ‘evaluation’ spell despair and are met with a deep sigh. Complication, jargon-filled, top down, box-ticking, funder-demanded, taking ages and very expensive are just some of the concerns and objections people have”.³⁹

Table 1
Outcome evaluation focus

Levels of enjoyment	88.4%
Personal development (e.g. in confidence, motivation, creativity)	83.7%
Levels of participation	77.9%
Quality of your work	75.6%
Development of artistic ability	58.1%
Academic progress in an arts subject	27.9%
Academic progress in English or maths	14.0%
None of the above	7.0%
Wellbeing	2.3%

Additionally, it may be that cultural organisations face some unique challenges when it comes to monitoring and evaluation. These may relate to the friction between the ‘potential of the arts to inspire’ and their contribution to a wider social purpose, or the challenges of prescribing at the outset of a programme the outcomes by which you will measure its success at the end if the process is flexible and participants may direct their own journey.⁴⁰

And yet, cultural learning practitioners may also have distinctive strengths when it comes to monitoring, evaluation and learning. They can employ their deep understanding of and widespread engagement in reflective practice, and use the creativity that is the lifeblood of their work to develop innovative evaluative approaches.⁴¹

Evaluation in the cultural sector can be inventive and creative, and lead to practice improvements based on sound evidence. With its broad range of strategic and delivery partners, Learning About Culture offers an opportunity for the sector to come together to bring this to life for cultural learning initiatives across the country.



Who are we working with?

Project Advisory Group

This group advises on the design of the Learning About Culture programme, ensuring that it responds to the needs of key stakeholders.

Vikki Heywood CBE, Chair of the RSA

Vikki has been Chair of the RSA board of trustees since 2013. She was formerly Executive Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and Joint Chief Executive of the Royal Court Theatre. She chaired the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value and was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 2012 for services to theatre.

Nic Beech, Principal, Ipsley CE RSA Academy

Nic has been Principal of Ipsley CE RSA Academy since May 2015. She entered teaching after studying Law and working at Barnardo's. Nic started working at Arrow Vale as Head of English in 2006, before progressing to the senior leadership team in 2009. When Ipsley converted to become an RSA Academy in 2013, she divided her time between Ipsley and Arrow Vale, before moving to Ipsley full-time in September 2014.

James Bird, Head of Arts, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

James has worked in strategic policy roles for the UK Government, the UK film industry and the European Commission. He is currently Head of Arts at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Nicky Morgan, Interim Director Children, Young People and Learning, Arts Council England

Nicky has worked in cultural education for most of her career firstly in public libraries, then moving to policy development in regional and national organisations. Nicky is currently Interim Director Children and Young People at Arts Council England.

Anthony Painter, Director of the RSA Action and Research Centre

Anthony leads the RSA Action and Research Centre, oversees the RSA's research, policy and practical innovation programmes. He previously directed the Independent Review of the Police Federation and has also worked in partnership with Google, the BBC, the BMA, the Education and Training Foundation, the Association of Colleges and the Metropolitan Police. Anthony is an FE Governor and charity Trustee.

Paul Roberts, Fellow of the RSA

As author of the DfE/DCMS-commissioned report “Nurturing Creativity in Young People”, Paul was adviser to UK government Ministers on the development of cultural education for young people. He is currently Chair of the Innovation Unit, Chair of Nottingham Music Education Hub, vice-Chair at Nottingham Contemporary and deputy-Chair at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts. He is adviser to the Arts Council on their development of national peer learning networks for Music Education Hubs and Cultural Education Partnerships. He was awarded an OBE in 2008 for services to Education and the Creative Industries.

Catherine Sutton, Senior Grants Manager, Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Catherine is a Senior Grants Manager at Paul Hamlyn Foundation, responsible for the Education and Learning through the Arts theme. Prior to joining Paul Hamlyn, she was a freelance consultant with a strong focus on impact and evaluation. Previous roles in the field of cultural learning include Director of Arts Inform, Head of ENO Baylis at English National Opera and Performing Arts Education Manager for Southbank Centre.

James Turner, Deputy Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation

Formerly Director of Programmes and Partnerships at the Sutton Trust, James led its successful bid to the Department for Education to establish the Education Endowment Foundation in 2011, before becoming the EEF’s first Deputy Chief Executive in September 2015. He sits on the board of PRIME, The Brilliant Club and accessprofessions.com, and is one of the founder directors of The Children’s University.



Funders

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- Arts Council England
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Foyle Foundation
- Bank of America Merrill Lynch
- The network of Bridge Organisations

2017				2018				2019				2020			
JAN-MAR	APRIL-JUNE	JULY-SEPT	OCT-DEC												



WORK STRAND 1: CULTURAL LEARNING FUND TRIALS

JAN-MAR:
Application window open

MAY-AUG:
Evaluation set-up meetings with delivery organisations and evaluators

MAR-MAY:
Consent collection

AUG-JULY:
Delivery of activities in school

NOV-MAR:
Independent evaluation report

MAR-MAY:
Appoint independent evaluator

MAY-JULY:
Baseline data collection

AUG-JULY:
Process and implementation data collection

FEB-MAY:
Shortlisting and selection of projects

AUG-MAR:
School recruitment

JULY-AUG:
Randomly allocate active and control group

APRIL-JUNE:
End data collection

JUNE-NOV:
Data analysis and report drafting



WORK STRAND 2: HOW SCHOOL CONTEXT INFLUENCES IMPACT

AUG-AUG:
Deep dive research in (non-trial) schools

SEPT-JAN:
Follow-up research in schools benefiting most/least from the trial projects



WORK STRAND 3: DEVELOPING THE USE OF EVIDENCE IN CULTURAL LEARNING

JUNE-JAN:
Use of evidence surveys

MAR-JULY:
Create and test framework for evidence-informed practice

OCT-AUG:
Pilot regional evidence networks with teachers, cultural learning practitioners

OCT-FEB:
Develop Creative Link Governor scheme

OCT-MAR:
Research in schools and with cultural learning organisations

MAY-AUG:
Pilot Creative Link Governor scheme

RSA REPORT
Programme prospectus

RSA REPORT
How to build an evidence-rich sector

RSA REPORT
Results from regional evidence networks pilot

RSA REPORT
Final report including accessible summaries of trial data



Join the conversation

Here are some questions to ask about approaches your cultural organisation or school takes to cultural learning.

- What drives innovation in cultural learning and what mechanisms are in place to support it?
- How do schools and practitioners know *what* works in cultural learning and *how* it works?
- Is there a need for a cross-sectoral approach to evaluating what works and how, and if so, what existing infrastructure might support it?

We would love to hear from you. Please do get in touch with us and share your reflections by emailing the Learning About Culture team on culturallearning@rsa.org.uk.

Notes

1. In line with the Cultural Learning Alliance's definition,² we define 'cultural learning' as active processes of learning about culture and through culture. It references a wide range of artistic disciplines as well as material artefacts, and how they relate to understanding of oneself and social conventions that shape the world around us. Practice in this field is wide-ranging in its methodologies, contexts and outcomes; this project will focus on cultural learning as it takes place:
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 - With children and young people aged 3–16 years
 - Where schools and arts and cultural organisations are working together, in collaboration, partnership or otherwise.
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