

Lizzie Lovejoy 0:13

Hello, everybody, welcome to the change of perspective Podcast, where we look at the world of creativity and art from many different perspectives. I'm your host, Lizzie Lovejoy, artists of change for Ark, creating work to celebrate the Northeast. Today our topic is arts education. And I'll be talking to Susan and Hannah.

Hello, everybody, and welcome to a change your perspective podcast. I'm Lizzie Lovejoy. And today we will be speaking to, Hannah and Susan. How are you guys doing?

Susan 0:45

We're doing fine. It's Friday. And it's Easter.

Hannah 0:48

Yes, really good. It's great to it's great to see some sunshine.

So can you tell us a little bit about who you are, and what you do.

Hi, my name is Hannah Scully. I'm a teacher of art. But I have I have quite a unusual role in the sixth form, actually, because I'm also a technician. And I work within arts development, which means working on various kinds of projects.

Susan 1:11

My kind of job list is ridiculously long. But if I could sum it up in a couple of things, first of all, I'm an artist, right? That's the most important thing. If I had to - you know that thing about if your house is on fire, what would you rescue? Right? So somebody- if somebody said to me, if if you couldn't use all the things on your email signature, which one would you keep it would be artist, because that's what takes you into whatever you're doing anyway.

But I'm freelance as an arts advisor and an arts consultant. And I work in the northeast of England and I work across the United Kingdom, I also work internationally, because of some of my later roles. At the moment, I serve on the World Council of the International Society, for education through art, which is the official UNESCO organization for art education. I'm a former president of the National Society, for education and art and design in this country.

As well as working in schools, colleges, museums, etc, I'm also Chair of governors in a primary school. I run, with the help from my MP, the all party parliamentary group, for art craft and design education, which used to meet up in Westminster. But now meets online, obviously. And then

outside of that, I'm a trustee of several charities, including access art, monk fish productions in Newcastle, and I'm also an associate of The Big Draw, and I think that might be it.

Hannah 2:46

So I think it's probably best to start off this discussion by defining what arts education actually is, and the breadth of things, which it covers. Because obviously, there's a lot of different creative subjects out there and a lot of different avenues. And I think it's important to say, that textiles is on the same footing as fine art. And art, craft and design is also like music, all of that is arts and are creativity based subjects. And so we're going to be talking about art education, from the perspective of educating those subjects, and using areas of art to educate other topics as well.

Susan 3:23

I mean, we're talking within an education system, which historically was set up during the times of the Industrial Revolution. And so basically, it stems down from prior to that the only people that had education with the people that would have lots of money and the arts are very much part of that, you know, the ones on the grand European tour, they learnt the musical instruments that read their literature, they learned Latin, or whatever. And when, unfortunately, the working classes joined education, it was mainly to educate people only to a certain level of literacy so they could become part of the mega machine of capitalism, etc. So that everything then went into boxes, and labels. So if you looked at over maybe 120 years, you'd probably find that art was a subject and schools, but it was mainly kind of drawing from natural forms. I wouldn't say that music was anything other than listening to music. I don't think people learned dance 120 years ago, they did learn a lot of craft skills, a lot of making because that was the idea is to get people to use their hands and become part of the workforce.

So what we're in now is we've inherited in secondary schools in particular, because we it's not so prominent in primary schools, we've inherited silos and boxes of subjects. And that means people put themselves in competition with each other. So the textiles teacher wants to have 25 children taking textiles. And the graphics teacher wants the same. So they might be even good friends in life, but they're competing against each other, because of the way that we have accountability within our schools. And that's a great shame. Because all art forms are equal, they really, really are. And the other thing is to remember that creativity does not belong to the arts. So the most successful schools and the schools that teach everything creatively, and don't have these divisions between subjects, and it's much stronger in England, that division, than it is in Scotland, or in Wales, or in some other countries.

Hannah 5:47

Yeah, I absolutely agree. You know, when you sign up for an A level, you've got, you know, like asked, we've got five different specialisms to choose from. And sometimes, you know, kids prospective kids, are asking, what's the difference between this What's the difference between that and it's, it's very difficult because because there's not a set difference, you can explore graphics within a fine art you can work digitally in art, craft and design, you can make some ceramics in

fashion and textiles, and it's about trying to get students to realize there's a lot of overlap in, in school and in education, as there should be, as there will be in a creative life and a career in the future.

There's so much you know, there's the transferable skills, it's, it overlaps everywhere, and, you know, especially I think people also forget about games as well, like games design, we have games design at school, and if you look at games without at uni, they do life drawing classes, they do sculpture, like is just, it's there's so much overlap. And that's, that's really brilliant. And that's, that's why it's exciting to do that. But if you look up, I guess qualifications like Arts Award. Arts Award is great, because you can do that qualification by doing some sculpture, but also some dance, music you can do, you can do a multitude of different things. And it all, it's all about the art.

Susan 7:11

Yeah, the games. Interesting. I remember once with the Baltic, we ran a Saturday session for secondary pupils, which was run by Ubisoft, the games designers in Gateshead, six schools came with, like, talented children from their schools. And these kids all turned up with iPads and laptops, and the games designer. So the three of them, they said, "Put those over in the corner, we're not using them." And they spent the day making characters for games out of clay, and writing stories about characters. Kids were astonished. And then they went back to school the next week and said to their teachers, I need to do some more drawing. I need to understand our figure moves. You know, they had assumed that you just had to have ability to code. And it isn't about that. It's about invention, isn't it?

I'll tell you what's really interesting. Norman Foster the architect? I don't know Norman Foster. But I know and Narinda Sagoo is one of these men men, and they have dropped down session. It's open plan, the architect's office in London, drop down section, the half a day, every week, where everybody in the organization is invited to come and draw. Whether it's the people on reception, or the security guards or the architects they all draw together. I think that's brilliant.

Lizzie Lovejoy 8:32

Yeah, that's such a good idea. And I think that kind of brings us on to the question of how does art help everyday people and how does art education help people with everyday life? Even if you're not specifically working in an art subject? How do creative activities and creative education - how does that help you progress with everyday working?

Hannah 8:58

You only have to look at lockdown and see what was keeping everybody sane really don't you? For the example, everyone was out and about, people going on walks, take photographs, drawing people joining things, online, people making things with their kids, people, you know, building things that will mud you know, people, it's everyone was engaging with music, and art and creativity whilst being stuck in the house.

Susan 9:24

It's one of the things that makes us stand among, above other primates because we always have to remember that human beings are very, very well developed primates is that we started to use our thumb and our finger and our hands and we started to make things in our history, which is why our closest relatives that baboons and the gorillas didn't get to that stage. Though they're quite happy in that way of life, etc. So it's, it's there in human psyche and being to make... Making is creativity. Simple as that, you know, we three were washed up on a desert island today, we wouldn't just sit there, we'd start working out where the sun was where to put the shelter what we could do with this suddenly, you know, I always loved the Tom Hanks film castaway. For that reason, when the basketball becomes a real person, Wilson that basketball, you know, and saves his sanity.

Lizzie Lovejoy 10:31

Yeah, it's fascinating the idea that creativity is necessary for sanity and necessary for being able to just develop and manage in day to day life, I know that I would definitely really struggle if I didn't have any means to be creative. And so I feel quite lucky to be in a position where I'm able to do that lockdowns really reveals a class divide and a difficulty in terms of being able to literally afford to have the equipment and be able to do these activities.

Susan 11:02

A really important point, because that's the other thing. The social divide has been heavily underlined by lockdown, it's always there, and it's never gonna go away. But we kind of, then measure success in being creative in in the cross stitch kits on the sculpture kits, give a child, one piece of paper for one hour, and they will make something with it. You know, and we will do that that's the desert island mentality. I mean, I play with things all the time, right, I've got some post it notes on here and all the time we're talking, I'll be flicking with these and, and I've already drawn on the back of them, right. So it's just there, it doesn't have to always be that you have a 1000 piece jigsaw, or a set of paint by numbers, oil paints, it's just there, play outside, go into the woods and pick up twigs. And what you can do is amazing.

Hannah 12:04

I think there's really links to the, you know, the big draw that we did as well in, in the autumn. Susan and I both on the steering group for the Northeast, art teacher, Education Network, and NEATEN. And we, you know, we really wanted to make an inclusive event and thought about what what people are going to have available to them to use, we love our big draw events, when we draw in hundreds of people usually we weren't able to do that this year.

And I think, you know, Susan certainly and, and the rest of the team had loads of great ideas about the Arboretum and what people have at home using leaves, building trees out of anything, making it inclusive, because people people can be people who aren't, haven't had a formal arts education can sometimes find it a bit intimidating, like oh, you know, I haven't had any drawing training, I can't do

this. But actually making those sort of events open to everybody in families, you know, we have such a, such a broad range of people turn up from all over the place and engage with videos and send in pictures to our Facebook group, the Arboretum really is great, it's great to see. So all different ages getting involved in making trees, drawing trees, making large piles of cotton buds, and alsorts.

Susan 13:18

There was noone up that couldn't have joined in that day. You know, nobody at all, even when I think Elaine humblebee went and mowed her lawn, right which she was going to do anyway, and she mowed a tree and the lawn and I just thought that was incredibly brilliant.

Hannah 13:37

So you've already ended up starting talking about this anyway. But what I wanted to ask is How have you used creativity to teach? And what have you used creativity to teach and what methods have you used

Susan 13:51

Are you talking within a - an art context? Or outside of that?

Lizzie Lovejoy 13:56

both?

Susan 13:57

Well, when I was a teacher, I always started my projects with a starting point that was a question. So that I didn't give children ever showed children what a good one looks like. So if I showed any examples, I would show a range of examples. But it also always done through questioning what can you do with that? And I never answered questions directly, which annoyed a lot of children, because they know the subjects, they would say how do you do this miss? And they would get the answer. And I would say Well, what do you think would be a good solution? So I would try and do it that way.

And I was in a position in the last years that I was teaching the school as an advanced skills teacher where I could work cross curriculum. And and I used to use that kind of questioning technique with training teachers from geography and PE etc. But you know that that whole simplicity of something which I think is very straightforward has been knocked down by the - mainly the conservatives in the last 11 years who just want a knowledge rich curriculum where children just learn facts, but they don't know how to apply them. So there's lots of people out there Lizzie, from, I mean, Ken Robinson has sadly died now, but bill Lucas and people like that are really pushing the creativity agenda. And seeing it as across all aspects of education.

Hannah 15:28

I think the thing is, as well for the kids and young adults, and, and grownups, you, you, you don't always have to give them things and instructions, you know, just having materials and time to problem solve and build things, they will create something amazing from that. And even, you know, at the very beginning, just making a mess, if I'm teaching clay to students, the first few things we make, usually, you know, there's holes in things things exploding is chaos, kids, like, this is not how I thought this is gonna go, but, they have broken down the barrier of working with clay. So the next time they work with clay, they know how it works, they know how to handle it, they know what went wrong last time, you know, those those skills are pretty essential.

And, and I find a level when kids are able to choose their own topic. That is when that's when the magic happens, if they've got something that they're really passionate about, they can just run with it, what they want to work with how they're going to do it. And it's just great, you know that

Susan 16:30

And not being afraid to make mistakes. Because in our education system in England, certainly in the in the earlier years, you don't make mistakes, you get wrong for making mistakes. And that's the only subject left that's got the autonomy to allow that but because all the other subjects are so rigorous schools are trying to apply that to the way that the arts are taught as well.

Hannah 16:57

So how does that link within your own artistic practices? Because obviously, you're both artists and artistic people, the way you teach, does that apply to your own way of processing and creating your own work?

Susan 17:10

Yes, yes, I I don't plan. I am. I've got my drawing desk to the right of me now. And like Hannah, Hannah, you're in sketchbooks circle this year. Yeah. And I've just got my sketchbook from my partner and I've had a look through it and, and I've got to respond to what she's done. But I don't plan it, it'll just happen. I do apply that to my own practice.

But when you come out of art college, you worry a little bit because you think you've got to be a successful artist with lots of exhibitions and, and the great big long CV and you think that's how its measured. But because I know so many artists teachers now what I'm saying to them is just do what you can do. And, and if you're just working on the back of an envelope, and you're just responding because you're bored in a meeting or whatever, just do it. The artwork has been taken over a little bit by commercial values of art. Like I don't know if you saw the Banksy that he did in, he put a canvas in the hospital the other week, and it's going to sell for 16 point 5 million, but he wants all the money to go to charity, which is wonderful. But you know, David Hockney is now selling paintings for 80 million pounds, who needs 80 million pounds. It's that much money. Where should that be going?

Hannah 18:29

Yeah, I very much agree with Susan and I can see I've already made a big mistake, excuse me, introduce yourself as an artist. I've gone straight in with a teacher and forgotten about all that joining the sketchbook circle this year has been brilliant because I did my fine art degree. And then I worked in the studio in 36 lime street for four years, which I absolutely adored and, and that's something that I kind of lost touch with a little bit. It's always been ongoing, really getting back into it and working with the students as well. It's so inspiring. I found being away from them in the lockdown, I thought I'd be able to do loads of art and spend loads of time in my studio in my loft and that would be really creative time. But actually I found I found myself a bit of a loose end and by being back with the kids like they are just they're just brilliant that they just have so many great ideas and and just the energy as well. I think it's contagious. And I think when you're working with people who are creative and have so much going on.

Susan 19:30

That's what Matiece said isn't it? Creativity is contagious. Pass it on.

Hannah 19:34

I had a zoom tutorial actually in lock down. An incredible is called Marian half who does collagraphs yes with mountboard or cereal box card. The work that she creates from sheets of card it's just incredible. Just the texture. She's like I stab it with anything you've got, you know, scratch it. Make some texture, do the spoon. It's just it's amazing. And the lick sir detailed.

Susan 20:01

And it's from anything, it's just, you know what we're saying earlier on, you can make it from anything, don't have to have a marvelous collection of materials.

Hannah 20:11

I think what's fascinating about what you've both said, is that it ends up being about challenging the idea of what a real artist is. And what a real job is that it's almost saying that what we're currently perceiving, or what we've been taught to perceive as a real job, and as real art. You just have to completely unlearn all of that.

Susan 20:32

Yeah, good. That's, that's a very good comment. And it's funny, isn't it? Because when I have friends that work on foundation courses, or Fine Art courses, and they say, when the children come to us from school, we have to unteach them? And I think no, you don't actually, you know, yeah, why should? Why should you assume they come to you, and you've got to wipe out their history of when

they're in school, you know, it's got to be a mix of different things. And I think that's a very insulting phrase, actually. And you get that from secondary school teachers, as well as though they've come to us from primary and they haven't done this suddenly, other so I've got to unteach them. Rubbish. But yeah, when I read out that list of job titles at the beginning, that's, that's what I am. That's who I am, who I am... I'm an artist. The other things only happened because of who I am.

Hannah 21:26

This is something that I'm assuming you guys will have heard a lot, because I know I've heard it a lot, which is in creative subjects won't get you a job, you won't be able to get a job if you study them. What's your thoughts and comments based on people that say that?

I mean, we could quite easily... We've got lots to say about Haven't we, Susan? I think I think like in education, we have trouble with - there's lots of parents, lots of parents will dissuade kids from pursuing creative careers, creative degrees. And I mean, it's it's like anything, you if you work hard, you can get the job that you want to make the job that you want. Susan shares loads of really brilliant infographics on social media, there was one recently about the huge scale of the creative industries. In the UK, we mentioned games earlier as well, games is such a huge industry is like tripled over lockdown or something, and the Northeast is a huge employer for games design. And that is that is that that's a fact. That's That's how it is. It's great.

And, you know, when you are doing an arts degree, or apprenticeship, and people are saying, Oh, you know, you what you should maybe do a sensible subject, like, What is it? What is the sensible subject? You can do an English degree, and still have the same kind of issue. There's not going to be millions and millions of jobs, you need to, you need to gain experience, and you need to be passionate and you need to network and those you'll be able to find your roots.

Susan 23:06

Our Hannah's right, I can prove it to you have to say prior to Brexit because costs obviously Brexit something as well as pandemic, but it was the highest growth industry in the United Kingdom. Second, biggest earner, the biggest earner was banking, finance, a lot of which has actually now gone abroad by the way.

And if we can revive that creative industries in this country, because I think Theatre and Film Production etc, has suffered a lot. Though I wouldn't think that the games industry, it's quintupled, it really has been incredible.

The other thing, which I think is important city, young people, you should really do what you love. Because life isn't just about having the biggest car in the street or the or the gazebo in the garden, right? It's about being happy. And if you do what you love, you will always be happy. And he will always enjoy what you do. And I think we have to move away the government uses statistics, which

is based on how much money a graduate is earning within three to five years of when they leave University. And they use those statistics to punish the arts. Right, because artists don't traditionally start earning lots of money, right? Because a lot of them are self employed. But bloody hell are happy at what they do. And if I was Prime Minister, that's what I would want to the job. So there, we've just got to be Myth Busters.

What would you say to people who are coming into art education as mature students? Because I know I've heard a lot of people say, Oh, I'm I'm too old to go back and do what I love and study what I wanted to. I've just waited too long. I've heard that several times and I personally don't think that it's ever too late to go into what you love. But I'm interested in what it is you would say to those people?

Well, there is actually a course at Leeds University of the Arts that I'm a visiting lecturer at. And it is people who have gone out of education comeback, and it is a Master's Course. And what's wonderful when you have the conversations with them, is that they were all in that situation where people told them, don't do art, right, you won't get decent job. And then they spent 10, 20, 30 years actually regretting it and having, then they've had the courage to come back. So in my kind of personal experience, I'm seeing the people that are coming back, and not being afraid to do it. And like Hannah said, the the person who thinks they're not creative that that crocheted a blanket over lockdown, they've realized that they are creative.

Hannah 25:55

I think that people can join things like foundation courses and evening classes and just have the absolute time of their lives as well. Always remember, I was in orchestra and there was a man there called Bill and he was 96. And he first picked up a cello when he was 80. And he was in the Wensleydale orchestra for all those years. And he was great. And he had the time of his life. So Bill says its never too late.

Susan 26:26

It's a mentor, isn't it? Yeah. So if there's any barriers there, they're not really made by those people and made again by we're talking about this restrictive kind of societal view of "you go into that box or that box", you know, you can't move from that one into that one. But you can. And distance learning as well Hannah now where people can gain the confidence by just signing up for a six week course in something, you know, without feeling that they're going into a room of people to be judged.

Hannah 27:00

I'm also interested in looking at the idea of well being and how that's connected to creativity and creative practice. Do you have any experience with how creativity and art has helped people with mental health and well being, because I know obviously, it's a stressful time in the middle of education

its so varied. So various students, student, a student, we, there is an epidemic of mental health crises for young people in this country and globally, but I find that our students are super, super resilient. And the ones that do have various struggles going on or have had various problems, the students can absolutely throw themselves into their artwork.

And it can go many different ways. Sometimes it's a fabulous distraction. And the students are able to explore something is totally different to their life while they're experiencing beautiful positive colorful artworks, things like that. And we also have students who are exploring things, you know, the, the cathartic manner is really an outlet for them. And it's just such a huge spectrum. And they really, really rely kind of on that their artwork to keep them to keep them going. And it makes such a difference.

And the students can throw themselves in to whatever it is they're working on, in a way that really, really helps them and sometimes it's not about, you know, the coursework, artwork, the exam, there's things like the art club, and students will set up their own art club, they'll sell their own workshop, or they'll say, Can I stay at school and, and try the pottery wheel and make a huge mess? of course!

At the minute have been making zines, they're seriously angry about the things that are going on things that are happening to young women, and they are making collaborative scenes, they are working together. They are self publishing. And it's just incredible. It's incredible the energy that these guys have,

Susan 28:58

I think the whole history of civilization and artists about art being a very healing thing. And, Lizzie, I mentioned, my role at insia to you and insia was set up after the Second World War by a great artist story and called Sir Hurbert Read to heal the youth of Europe, who had been damaged by everything that had gone on in in their their countries in their personal lives. And if you look at the history of art from Louis Wain to free the carloads of Tracy Emin you know, art is seriously important in individual well being and I know you've talked about students there but we also have been talking about adult learners here.

At the last parliamentary meeting, which we had a few months ago. All the speakers that I brought to that meeting, worked in prisons, art education in prisons. Now that was fascinating because during lockdown They haven't been allowed to go into prisons to work with prisoners. There's the work that they showed from previous to that. And comments and statements from people who have been affected by having that artistic release when incarcerated in prison was empowering beyond belief. You know, so there's lots of evidence to support that. The mental health, and also the physical well being of a lot of people.

And there's a great movement at the moment, I'm about to start mentoring a disabled artist, there's a great movement at the moment into recognizing that no matter what your level of physical disability is, you can access the arts, because that helps you deal with that. And brings you more into society, which is very good at excluding disabilities, whether they're mental, or physical, or both.

Hannah 31:03

Have you experienced a devaluing or defunding of art in education? Because I know, when I was doing my GCSEs, I was specifically taken out of my art GCSE lessons to study a different subject that they thought would be more beneficial to me, as they'd say, Oh, you still have to complete your art GCSE, but you're not going to be in the lessons for it, because we think it'd be better spent at German, or whichever subject that they decided they think I would need more assistance in. Have you experienced anything like that?

Susan 31:35

Yeah, I'd say it's since 2010, when the coalition government got in. And then Michael Gove created literally on the back of an envelope, that list of subjects called them the English baccalaureate, and has told schools. Well, he hasn't now because he's not in that job. Schools have been told they have to meet these five or six subjects, key priority areas. So that that means that the arts have been decimated across the entire secondary curriculum, but also in primary because in primary, you're judged only on numeracy and literacy and your, your year six SATS. So yeah, we've seen it, we've seen the most atrocious damning of the arts and only brave had teachers and brave schools that have fought against it. Ethical Leadership, as it were, like, Durham Sixth Form center, to be honest.

Hannah 32:38

I think, I think, obviously, that you know, that there's barriers, certainly into getting into FE, you know, often to stay on, you have to have certain grades, and to get on certain courses. And that's, that's, you know, a huge barrier there. But the students that I've worked with, particularly neurodivergent, students have been incredible, like the work that the students create, it's just outstanding and so different to the way that other students are working, particularly with writing and painting, these guys are just, they just really lead the way and will, they can make anything out of anything, you know, particularly these students as well are incredibly passionate, a lot of them. A lot of these students have explored kind of this, particularly recently, one's been looking at autism and actions in America was making small publications about this, looking at really sort of really disturbing content was so passionate about these topics, and it's just blows me away.

Susan 33:56

I don't think you need to go to university. I think that's a myth as well. I've worked with the heritage crafts Association, and they're desperately trying to get money for apprenticeships so that at 18 if you'd like to work in with your hands, you could be apprentice to a Thatcher or an iron worker or a blacksmith, you know, and I'm not convinced of the value of the degree as I was maybe 20 years ago.

Hannah 34:24

All right. So I guess what I want to know now, is there any projects or things that you guys are working on at the moment that you want to talk about and share

Susan 34:35

the group that Hannah and I both in, NEATEN, We've done we've done webinars, and we've joined it with another group down in Norwich, and we're having a ball aren't we Hannah? Considering Noone - Well, he I knew those people in Norwich, but you lot didn't know them at all until four or five months ago and that's going to grow and grow and grow. And as part of my international work, we've been doing international webinars. I'm not just doing it by education, kind of bring in people from different European countries together to talk about it. And that's been fantastic. Because that's led to things afterwards. So there's, there's a lot going on actually.

Hannah 35:14

There's always there's always plenty going on. Yeah, if you can follow NEATEN on Twitter and Instagram, it is @ NEATEN Art. Some of my students doing an online exhibition very soon. Our Instagram as well. So that's @ DSFC art, you can see all the different things that they're up to. And some of our foundation students do take overs as well. You can see a day in the life of with those guys on the socials. That'll be that'll be coming up soon.

Susan 35:44

Neaten people, Paul has written a book about drawing, so we're going to do a book launch online. And he's going to launch his book, alongside a lady called Andrea saffer Rico, who, actually in 2018, she's an art teacher, she won the global teacher award, she won \$1 million. And she set up an artist in residence charity

I'm on Twitter, I am @ the Art criminal, which was something I made up on the spur of the moment, about 15 years ago, and I've never regretted the name since.

Hannah 36:20

Alright, so that brings us to a close for this discussion on arts education. It has been fantastic to speak to both of you, Hannah and Susan. So thank you everybody for listening. And see you next time. Bye

Susan 36:35

bye.