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Can an art and cultural center be established in an average secondary school?

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Can an art and cultural center be established in an average secondary school ?

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Research work in design
under the supervision of Ann Pham Ngoc Cuong, Laurence Pache
and Catherine Pradeau

Eco-design specializing in interior and landscape design
School Raymond Loewy
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Foreword

I have had a passion for dancing since I was four years old and I have practised it for fourteen years, I have always had a strong connection to art and culture. Entering a theater, standing on a stage and seeing the seats amazes me every time. A feeling of gravity mixed with freedom. The impression that everything is possible and that at this moment a new window is open, full of dreams and truths. Deep inside I feel that I am living a privileged and particular moment. Thrill, I think that's it ! I have the urge to be surprised by the discovery of an artistic novelty.

It is this privilege that I would like to convey through this diploma thesis and abstract. Culture is what unites us and organises the consistency of a better world. Thus, let art surprise you !

Introduction

In my french diploma thesis, I chose to tackle the issue of the art and cultural center in secondary schools located in rural areas. The aim was to understand what an art and cultural center can be, specifically in this kind of environment, and to establish a first design brief. The goal of the abstract is to compare what I found in my French diploma thesis with the current situation in Great Britain and especially in England. I may find some significant differences or similarities which could help me to consider some possibilities to develop this type of space in France and in England. This abstract is also the opportunity for me to continue the reflection I started in my French in order to find a first solution which may be usable either in England or in France.

We will first question how English schools work and what kind of teachings are delivered as far as art and culture are concerned. But to understand the present situation, we first have to understand the history of art in Great Britain and what type of relationship existed in the past and exists today between art and people. By searching these pieces of information, we may find some clues to build up a design brief in order to establish an art and cultural center in an average english secondary school.

| 1 |

**How have
secondary
schools
evolved along
history ?**

How have secondary schools evolved along history ?

Let's introduce the subject by an historic point of view...

The history of education in Great Britain is a long one. First, secondary schools were established during the Middle Ages only for middle class citizens' or aristocrats' children. During the seventeenth century, most English towns had a secondary school called at that time Grammar School. They offered a free or unexpensive education to young boys. Since 1640 almost 1/3 of the English population have been able to read because the country had a big commercial development so people who had the capacity to read were needed. During the Industrial Revolution, secondary schools and schools in general were managed by the Church. Even if the number of people who attended school increased, school education was still reserved to middle class citizens and the ruling classes.

The year 1833 marked a turning point in the history of education because the British government established a first budget in favour of the creation of secondary schools especially for low-income families. Some activists protests flared throughout the country at that period and finally, in 1870, the government wrote the first Education Act which made education and school compulsory for all children from 5 to 10 years old. Some other Education Acts were written after that, like the Grammar School Act in 1840 or the Endowment Schools Act in 1869



to strengthen the role of the central government to guarantee free secondary teaching in schools. In my opinion, the main Education Act in British history was passed in 1944. It made secondary education compulsory for all adolescents until the age of fifteen. This was a bit more complicated than before because this system was composed of three types of secondary schools: first the Grammar Schools which had a classical curriculum, then, the second type of secondary schools were the Technical Schools which offered a technical curriculum and finally, Secondary Modern schools taught other fields of knowledge. For all of them, students were selected at the age of eleven. Twenty years later, a new reform, thanks to the Circular 10/65 extended the concept of Comprehensive Schools to all the country. This kind of secondary schools are non selective. Even if most British schools adopted this system, some still keep selecting their pupils at the age of eleven years old, like in the old system.

The present situation is quite the same as in the past. Access to Education is free and concerns almost ninety per cent of the population. State schools, which represent quite the same proportion as public schools in France, combine Secular schools that are either managed by Local Education Authorities or barely autonomous, and Faith Schools, managed by churches and religions. Even if these schools are financed by private funds, they all follow the National Curriculum, which establishes a common frame regarding contents and exams. Do these private

donations obligate some teaching particularities? The Local Education Authorities (LEAs) determine the essentials of the educational landscape locally.

The present trend goes toward more and more autonomy for schools, such as Academies, which are independent from the Local Education Authorities and funded by the government department for education. This kind of schools can be co-funded by a private donation and have the power to choose their political stance on specialization or education. Nowadays, these schools are complemented by the Free Schools Program, which plays on words, because it means both that these schools are free for students and also that they are liberated from any educational system.

Because of the local system of management, every school has a Governor who has the power to choose the headmaster and all teachers. He has also the heavy task to determine the gist of the school's policy. Even if all these schools have different management systems, all pupils have to pass the same exams like the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and A Levels. We can notice that the final two years of secondary educational cycle in England are more specialised than in France. Art can be one of the subjects chosen by the student...

| 2 |

**What type of
relationship
existed in
the past and
exist today
between art
and people in
Great Britain ?**

What relationship exist between art and people ?

From The Globe to the Brexit decision.

The history of drama in Great Britain was marked by William Shakespeare¹, the most famous playwright ever. His theater called The Globe represents a perfect example of the elizabethan theater type. Even if it burnt in 1613¹¹, it was rebuilt in London to continue honouring Shakespeare's memory. This type of theater represents the hierarchy between people that took place at that time. The more affluent people were well seated on sort of benches around the stage and the poorer ones were standing in front of the stage with animals like pigs and all the dust. This organization is the opposite of what is happening nowadays. The seats in front of the stage at a concert for example, are very expensive because you are the nearest possible to the artist, on the contrary, the further you are from him or her, the cheaper the ticket is. Unfortunately, this kind of place can be disturbing for spectators who want to see properly a play because during this kind of shows, these people are seated and the height of the stage doesn't enable to visualize actors correctly, especially if these spectors are seated at the top.

¹. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) is one of the most famous playwrighter of the english culture.

¹ Degaine A. (2000). Histoire du théâtre dessinée : De la préhistoire à nos jours, tous les temps et tous les pays. Paris. Librairie A-G Nizet. 437 p. ISBN : 978-2707811615

The Globe theater - London
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The Brexit decision was a major thing in the history of Great Britain but it has had a major impact on the world of Art. Usually, national museums are free but some private museums still ask for entry fees. These museums, because of the Brexit, have increased their fees. It can be very difficult for a part of the population to have access to these places because they are expensive. This is due to the exclusion of Great Britain from the European Union which has deleted a lot of donations. More important, English museums often borrow some works of art from private people and especially foreigners to enrich the collection of art pieces from all over the world. Because of the Brexit decision, these exchanges are no longer possible and art tourism in Great Britain will suffer from less diversity, only British art would be present in museums. English people will only have access to English art and the opening to the rest of the world will be limited. When we know that the aim of culture and art is to open minds and give a lot more possibilities to see and interpret the world, this situation is not good.

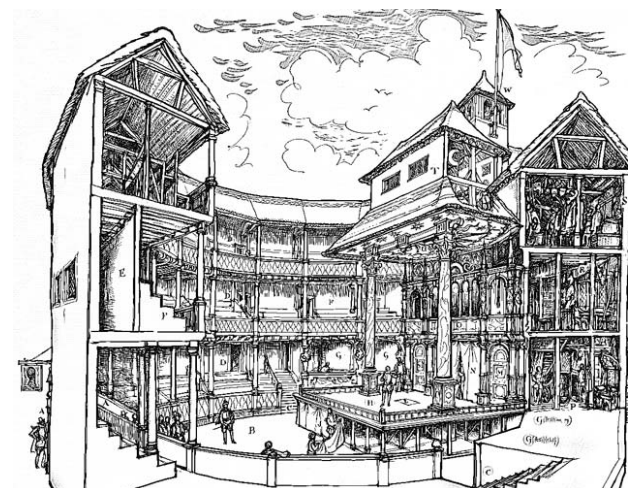
English artists wrote a letter for a famous British newspaper called The Daily Telegraph, in which they explained that many of them have worked on projects which would never have happened without European Union subsidies². So we can see that the European Union is very important in the access to art for all the people.

² <http://www.telerama.fr> (12/03/2018)

What relationship exist between art and people ?

Tens of millions of euros are donated each year by the European Regional Development Fund and the Creative Europe Program to develop artistic projects. One of these projects is the Arts Partnerships Program, which is still in progress with six countries participating. Its goal is the popularisation of art thanks to workshops, artist residency and participatory pieces.

Some people see the Brexit as a good thing for France in order to regain its place on the European art market. But in my opinion its not a good idea because the European union works to ensure the access to art to all kinds of population and it is an opportunity for european citizens to see works of arts from foreign artists.



The Globe theater - London
© DR

| 3 |

**How is art
taught in
an average
comprehensive
or faith
secondary
school ?**

How is art taught in an average secondary school ?

The Hart School : an exemple of an average english secondary school.

In order to explain this topic, I will use a case study about The Hart School, which is a secondary school located in Rugeley, a town two hours and forty-five minutes far from the north west of London. This educational establishment is an innovative one and it is a member of the Creative Educational Trust Family of schools. This organization ensures that pupils will receive far more experiences than in other schools, such as more opportunities in sport, more opportunities to perform, more opportunities to be leaders in the schools. This school follows the national curriculum, which is composed of several teachings like english, mathematics, sciences, geography, history, modern foreign languages, design and art, music, performing arts, computing and physical education. The artistic field is the one that interests us most. It is taught every year in secondary school and, especially, in year seven, eight, nine and ten. These classes are the first four of the secondary education cycle. Each student has twenty five periods of sixty minutes each per week and the artistic field fills at most six periods. In year seven for example, design represents two hours, art, music and drama or dance only one. However, in the last two years (Years nine and ten), this kind of teaching is optional and only represents three hours per week.

HMC - Choral and Instrumental Concert, Merchiston Castle School
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“We recognise that the spiritual, moral, social and cultural personal development of students plays a significant part in their ability to learn and achieve. We aim to ensure that we nurture students who can participate fully and positively in a democratic, modern Britain”¹

Even if the classical curriculum art is very important, English schools have a system of extra activities at lunch time or not, which represent a major opportunity to learn more and more things in a “cooler” way. A school day in England frequently ends at about quarter past three so it gives time to all children to practise another activity for their personal fulfillment. These activities are not mandatory but generally, pupils like to take part in these clubs. At the Hart School, at lunch time, senior singer or karaoke club enable students to express themselves by singing and maybe sometimes acting when it is a karaoke. After school time, some activities such as Disney Trip Dancers, Drama Club, Photography intervention, band or Dance Club are available. One of them, the choir club is quite similar to what happens in some French secondary schools. Nevertheless, just like in the French system, these activities take place in school rooms like the library or the music room.

We can see by this observation that, even if art is more taught in this school, spaces and rooms are neither adapted nor designed to host

¹ <http://www.hartschool.org.uk/> (12/03/2018)

How is art taught in an average secondary school ?

these activities. There is still work for an interior and landscape designer to rethink these spaces.

Contrary to France, where art teaching is still minor, Great Britain includes this field of knowledge into the National Curriculum. Unfortunately, we will observe in the last part of this abstract, that rooms and indoor spaces dedicated to art teaching and culture are inconsistent with the uses entailed by this field of study. As in France, the designer has to make a list of all the activities in an average British comprehensive or faith school in order to know what type of devices such activities require.

FRANCE		ENGLAND	
Lycée	Baccalauréat Terminale	Sixth Form - College	A-LEVELS Year 13 (or Upper sixth)
	1 ^{ère}		Year 12 (or Lower sixth)
	2 ^{ème}	Secondary School	GCSE Year 11
Collège	BREVET DES COLLEGES 3 ^{ème}		Year 10
	4 ^{ème}		Year 9
	5 ^{ème}		Year 8
	6 ^{ème}		Year 7

| 4 |

**A design brief
to establish
an art and
cultural center
in a secondary
school located
in Great
Britain?**

How to establish an art and cultural center in a school ?

Schools indoor spaces in England are quite the same as in France. Therefore, artistic activities are delivered in ordinary classrooms. Anyway, we can notice some differences in England, because of the particular system of secondary schools we saw a little bit earlier in this abstract. Some of these schools are religious, so they usually have (a church or) a chapel on their premises. Even if the first use of this location is religious, it can also host a choir or an orchestra class. This site is very specific to faith schools but all educational establishments in Great Britain possess an assembly room. This indoor space serves for assemblies, that is to say meetings usually in the morning before classes start. It is ordinarily fitted with a platform for the major speaker of the assembly and an audience area. Thus, this room is equipped to welcome a show like a play or a concert. Its generally wide surface offers a large panel of possibilities to imagine that some artistic activities can take place in this part of the school.

Libraries inside English schools are usually beautiful locations where pupils go to find some calm and a perfect atmosphere to concentrate. However, these indoor spaces are usually composed of a wonderful structure which can be used to display some works of art. The work of an interior and landscape designer for this kind



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of activity is not only to hang these objects but to think about what the space needs to become a real art and cultural center like a little museum. How can we adapt an indoor space to host an exhibition or a show ?

As school indoor spaces are nearly the same in Great Britain and in France, we will then keep thinking about what such spaces need to become an art and cultural center. If we consider that this art and cultural center can be located in the assembly room or in an ordinary classroom, which are not at all equipped with artistic or scenographical systems, what is needed to ensure a proper exhibition, ballet or play ? First these rooms have to be able to enlighten the place where actors, dancers or works of art will stand. So, the school may have to invest in a little batch of spotlights or any device that can provide proper lighting whatever the show requires or wherever it takes place. Moreover, to see the stage lighting properly, the room has to be completely dark. If it is not originally possible, the designer has to think about a system which can conceal the natural light through windows.

If the activity lasts several days and the works of art or pieces of stage decorations stay in the room for a long time, the room has to be secured during the night. Furthermore, the pieces don't necessarily have to be placed in a closed room. The school might choose to display in the playground. In any case, the designer has to advise the school to equip the space with a

A quick design brief !

security system or to dedicate a little area where precious and expensive things can be stored. To meet this requirement a storage container can be imagined in the playground for example.

The designer can think about an exhibition system like those that are beautifully staged in museums : paintings, sculptures and so on. But there is the question of the funding, which is very touchy for schools. Even if we saw that english schools are financed by either private donations or public ones, these establishments generally don't want to pay anything whenever there is a new activity or exhibition. So, the scenography system has to be very cleverly designed so as to be versatile and used for all kinds of activities. The device has to be adaptable in a basic



HMC - Royal Russell School
© DR

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classroom as well as in an assembly room. We deliberately choose here the two opposite kinds of spaces but the atmosphere it conveys is also to be considered. A ballet show, for example, cannot be organized in an ordinary classroom because dancers need space to make their movements. However, if we want a cosy atmosphere for an exhibition, it can be better to set it up in a smaller room.

The concept of module can be explored to achieve this goal. If we combine several modules like transversal boards, they can shape a little stage. However, if we took the same modules and combined them vertically, we would have a series of billboards to display some works of art. The question about the mobility of this device is also very important because Art and cultural activities in French schools can move from one place to another according to the needs and constraints. Thus, the designer has to think about how the system (he designed) would be carried. Because of the transport issue, the designer also has to think about the storage of the device. Indeed, this system has to be cleverly designed so as to take as little space as possible. To make this possible, some foldable elements may be added to the device. It could be very adequate to manage to design an element which would look like a simple plank when it is folded and become a big volumetric shape when unfolded.

A quick design brief !

The adaptability of the device is very important and has to be considered during the design phase. But the first step, as we said earlier, is to make a list of what a school needs to have a space considered as a real art and cultural center and to have it identified as such by pupils. We can finish by saying that this future site is not only a tool of art outreach and mediation but it can also become a means to empower teenagers to become responsible for what it contains.



HMC - The King's School, Chester
© DR

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that the reflection about a possible art and cultural center located in a school is nearly the same in France and in Great Britain. We can nevertheless notice some differences in favour of Great Britain. First, it exists some extra school or lunch time activities dedicated to art and culture like choir, ballet or music. Art teaching in England and the States is more integrated in the curriculum as opposed to France where pupils have only one hour of plastic arts and one hour of music per week. The British educational system and its history can be inspiring for potential donors in France. If private donors are interested in art and culture, can give more and more money to develop these activities and the sites to host them. We also saw that art and especially drama takes a big part in the history of Great Britain, with William Shakespeare for example but, unfortunately, the Brexit decision entails a decrease in museums attendance rate and exchanges between countries all over the world.

Culture and art need to be relocated in other spaces like schools. Indoor spaces and special locations have thus to be rethought by designers to ensure these kinds of activities, while preserving the atmosphere that incorporates such special moments as shows or exhibitions.

Acknowledgements

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Finally, I want to thank my classmates for supporting and helping me by remembering me that this research is mine.

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INTERNET SOURCES

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<http://www.hartschool.org.uk> (12/03/2018)

Summary

The aim of this abstract is to compare the French situation with the English one about the establishment of an art and cultural center in an average secondary school. It is also the opportunity for me to give a continuation to the diploma thesis I wrote in French.

The history of secondary schools in Great Britain, and especially in England, were marked by changes through years such as the contribution of private donors. The history of British theatre and art also shows they aim to be an important part in everybody's life but, unfortunately, the Brexit decision seems to be a turning point in the history of art in England.

Even if educational spaces are nearly the same as in France, we can notice some particularities in England such as the presence of an assembly room in every school. Extra activities can also represent a good opportunity to include more art classes in the curriculum. Finally, the design solutions I could find through my research are quite the same in the English situation. Modules, mobility and the adaptability of devices will be guidelines for my diploma project.

