

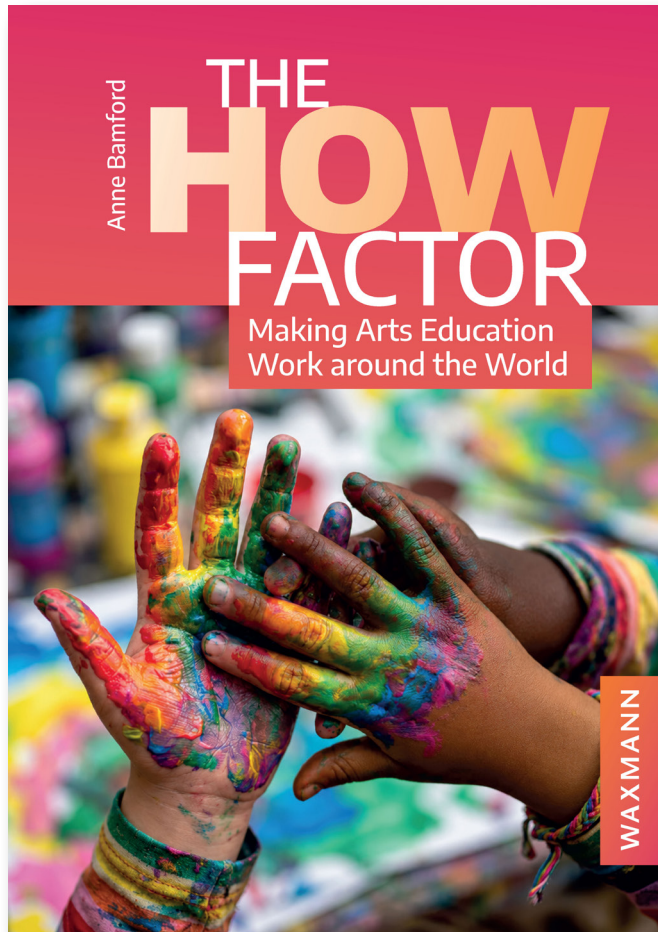


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The How Factor

Making Arts Education
Work around
the World

2026, 534 pages,
pb., € 69,90,
ISBN 978-3-8188-0217-2
E-Book: € 62,99,
ISBN 978-3-8188-5217-7



Executive Summary



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Executive summary

Objectives

The How Factor was developed to move beyond the question of why culture and arts education matters and focus instead on how it can be successfully implemented, sustained and scaled. While decades of research have demonstrated the benefits of culture and arts education for creativity, academic achievement, wellbeing, cultural identity, inclusion, social cohesion, innovation and economic development, implementation remains uneven across countries and regions. Too often, arts education exists as a collection of isolated projects, dependent on individual champions, temporary funding, or short-term policy priorities.

The objective of *The How Factor* was therefore to identify the conditions that enable culture and arts education to become embedded as a sustained, accessible and systemic component of quality education. It reveals what governments, schools, cultural institutions, artists, communities, and international organisations can do to transform successful initiatives into lasting educational ecosystems.

The work was guided by the principles of Education for All, the Sustainable Development Goals, and UNESCO's long-standing commitment to culture, creativity, and human development. Particular attention was given to understanding how culture and arts education can contribute to quality education that is inclusive, culturally relevant, future-focused, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners and communities.

Methods

The How Factor draws upon an extensive body of evidence gathered through global consultations, regional dialogues, policy reviews, research synthesis, case studies, and analysis of implementation experiences across multiple countries and contexts. It builds on the legacy of the UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education (2006), the Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education (2010), MONDIACULT 2022, and subsequent international monitoring and review processes.

The study examined examples from formal, non-formal, informal and lifelong learning environments and considered experiences from 220 countries and nations. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying successful implementation practices rather than simply documenting policy intentions. The analysis explored governance structures, financing mechanisms, teacher development, partnerships, curriculum approaches, research systems, digital technologies, cultural heritage, creative industries, and community engagement.

Rather than seeking a single model of implementation, *The How Factor* recognises that successful systems emerge from local contexts. The focus is on identifying common enabling conditions that could be adapted to different cultural, social, economic and educational circumstances. Countries were evaluated against a framework of twenty quality indicators for arts and cultural education. Ten core criteria assessed whether systems provided consistent and compulsory arts education, clear policy and curriculum, accessibility and equity, diverse art forms, education both in and through the arts, opportunities for

performance and exhibition, partnerships between education and culture, qualified teachers, sustainable funding, and active community cultural provision. A further ten indicators recognised stronger systems through early years provision, secondary arts pathways, specialist institutions, informal and out-of-school learning, digital innovation, extracurricular opportunities, cultural organisations with education programmes, and long-term support from civil society. Using this framework, 50 countries (22.7%) demonstrated good or better arts education systems, while 16 countries (7.2%) offered little or no accessible arts education because of severe structural, political or economic barriers. The remaining countries provided reasonable but uneven provision.

Globally, visual arts and music remain the dominant art forms, with an average of just 90 minutes of arts education per week in primary schools, most often taught by generalist rather than specialist teachers. Rather than producing a league table, the analysis recognises that quality varies within countries and that strong systems are characterised by continuous improvement. The findings reveal both encouraging global progress and profound inequalities, highlighting the urgent need for international cooperation to ensure every child can realise their cultural rights through equitable access to high-quality arts and cultural education.

Conclusions and recommendations

The evidence demonstrates that successful culture and arts education arises through sustainable implementation requires an ecosystem approach in which governance, policy, resources, partnerships, people, knowledge and cultural assets work together over time. To achieve this requires:

1. **Strong governance and policy coherence.** Countries that have achieved sustained progress have established long-term policy frameworks, inter-ministerial collaboration, and third-entity mechanisms that survive political cycles. Effective implementation depends on cooperation between education, culture, heritage, youth, social welfare and economic development sectors.
2. **Culture and arts education must be recognised as a human right and a public good.** Access to cultural participation and artistic learning should not depend on geography, income, disability, gender, language, ethnicity or migration status. Successful systems explicitly address issues of inclusion, and cultural diversity.
3. **Investment in leadership, teachers, artists and cultural practitioners is essential.** Teacher preparation, professional learning, artist-teacher partnerships, and professional recognition systems emerged strong predictors of quality implementation. The quality of culture and arts education rarely exceeds the quality of the people who implement and facilitate it.
4. **Networks, collaborations and partnerships matter.** Sustainable systems are characterised by strong relationships between schools, cultural organisations, artists, museums, libraries, creative industries, communities, universities and governments. These partnerships expand opportunities, share expertise, and create collective ownership.
5. **Robust research, monitoring and evaluation systems** build evidence, support accountability, and drive continuous improvement. Monitoring is a core mechanism for learning and system change.

6. **Sustainable financing is fundamental.** Successful countries move beyond short-term project funding towards long-term investment models that combine public funding, private contributions, philanthropy, community support, and partnerships. Financial resources must be accompanied by investment in infrastructure, materials, time and human capacity.
7. **Digital technologies offer significant opportunities** but must be implemented thoughtfully. Digital tools can increase access, support creativity, connect learners, preserve cultural heritage, and expand participation. However, implementation must address issues of digital equity, ethics, misinformation and the preservation of local cultures.
8. **Culture and arts education should connect heritage, creativity and contemporary learning.** Effective programmes draw upon both tangible and intangible cultural heritage while encouraging innovation, critical thinking, and future-oriented skills. Heritage is the foundation for creativity and cultural continuity.
9. **Culture and arts education extend across formal, non-formal, informal and life-long learning settings.** Museums, libraries, cultural centres, community organisations, and creative industries all play vital educational roles. Learning occurs throughout life and across multiple environments.
10. **Implementation requires shared philosophical vision.** Education systems are undergoing profound transformation in response to social, technological, environmental, and cultural change. Culture and arts education provides essential capacities for navigating this complexity, including creativity, imagination, empathy, critical thinking, cultural understanding, ethical judgment, and human agency.

The findings of *The How Factor* reinforce a simple but powerful conclusion that culture and arts education is the foundation of quality education itself. The arts contribute directly to the goals of *Education for All* by supporting inclusion, participation, engagement, identity formation, communication, cultural understanding, and lifelong learning. They provide opportunities for learners whose strengths may not be recognised through traditional academic pathways and create spaces where diverse cultures, languages, histories and perspectives can be valued and expressed. At a time when societies face increasing complexity, uncertainty and rapid technological change, the arts help develop the uniquely human capacities. Creativity, imagination, collaboration, empathy, cultural literacy, ethical reflection, and innovation are central to the future of education and society.

The How Factor demonstrates that successful implementation is possible. Around the world there are examples of systems that have embedded culture and arts education through sustained policy commitment, investment, partnership and community engagement. The challenge is no longer whether culture and arts education matters, but how to create the conditions that allow it to flourish. The *how* lies in building interconnected ecosystems where governance, rights, teachers, artists, partnerships, research, financing, technology, heritage and lifelong learning combine to ensure that every learner, everywhere, can access meaningful cultural and artistic experiences throughout their lives. When these conditions are in place, culture and arts education becomes the driver of educational quality, human development, cultural vitality, social cohesion, peace, sustainability and flourishing.