

## More international comparisons

### BENCHMARK THE ARTS TOO

Just when we are being urged to 'benchmark' our children's schooling against systems like Singapore and Hong Kong which do well in the PISA tests of 'key competencies' in reading, maths and science, we have a major report from the United States that reminds us that while these three areas of learning are crucial and non-negotiable, 'key competencies' for a 21st century education system need to be more broadly defined.

The report on arts education from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (honorary chair, Michelle Obama), is of considerable significance here no less than in the US. It asserts the case for the arts and creativity in education not just in terms of familiar arguments about educational enrichment, but also by reference to hard evidence about enhancing motivation and engagement, tackling social disadvantage and boosting children's understanding and performance in literacy and numeracy (for we know that learning in one area enhances learning in others). Like the 1999 Robinson report, the US report covers creativity in its broadest sense, as a quality of thinking which is needed in all kinds of situations, as well as the arts themselves.

In August the *Times Educational Supplement* published an article about this from CPR director Robin Alexander, and now 19 leading figures from the arts, business and education - including Robin - have published an open letter in *The Observer* calling on the government 'to adopt coherent and integrated policies which will ensure that creativity and innovation are at the heart of what our education system offers.'

*Robin Alexander*

Read the 2011 US report *Reinvesting in Arts Education*  
[http://www.pcah.gov/sites/default/files/photos/PCAH\\_Reinvesting\\_4web.pdf](http://www.pcah.gov/sites/default/files/photos/PCAH_Reinvesting_4web.pdf)

Read Robin Alexander's *TES* article, 19 August 2011: 'Evidence from the US tells us that the arts belong at the heart of the curriculum – but it's our last chance to make this happen',  
<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6109287>

Read the open letter 'The battle for arts and minds' in *The Observer*, 4 September 2011:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2011/sep/04/observer-letters-libya-bahrain-intervention?INTCMP=SRCH>

Read Toby Helm's linked article 'Education policies risk stifling creativity' in *The Guardian*, 3 September 2011  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/sep/03/education-policies-risk-stifling-creativity>