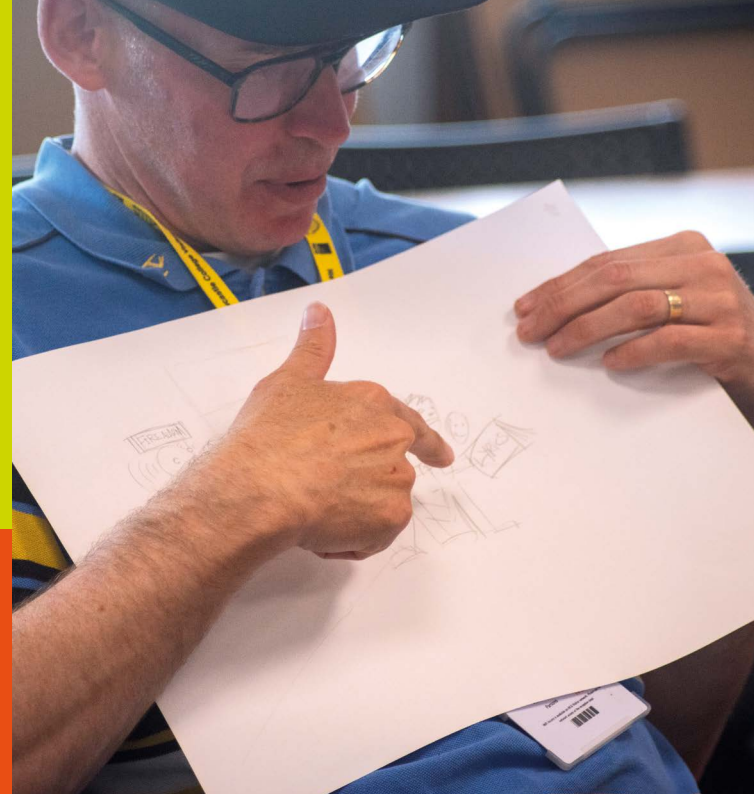




GLOW
NEWCASTLE



CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

2025



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INTRODUCTION

GLOW Newcastle is a new organisation that has evolved from Newcastle's Cultural Education Partnership. By working collaboratively across sectors, sharing resources and responding to local needs and interests, we aim to create a city where all young people aged 0-25 have access to high quality cultural opportunities that enable them to flourish as active, creative, connected and engaged members of our community.

The number of young people experiencing social and emotional mental health challenges in education is increasing. Whilst there is growing evidence of the wellbeing benefits of engaging in expressive arts activity, there has been a decline in the availability and uptake of arts provision in schools.

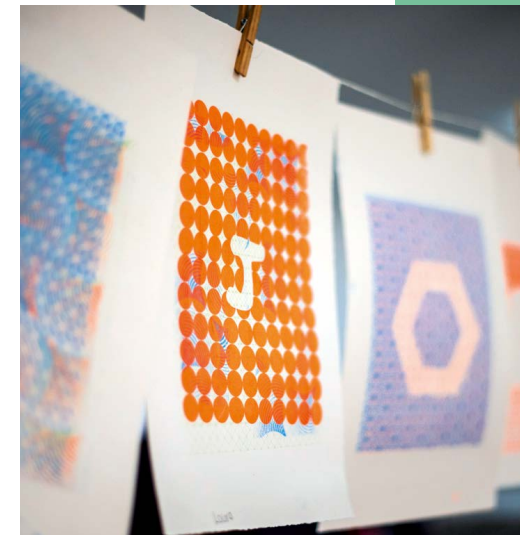
Glow Creative Connections is an action research project funded and supported by the North East Combined Authority Excellence in Education programme led by GLOW Newcastle. The project seeks to develop understanding between artists and educational professional working on projects that aim to support young people's social and emotional wellbeing.

Between February and July 2025, four artist-practitioners were paired with three different educational settings, where they ran regular creative workshops with a group of young people. A researcher attended each project to observe activity and facilitated four action learning group sessions that

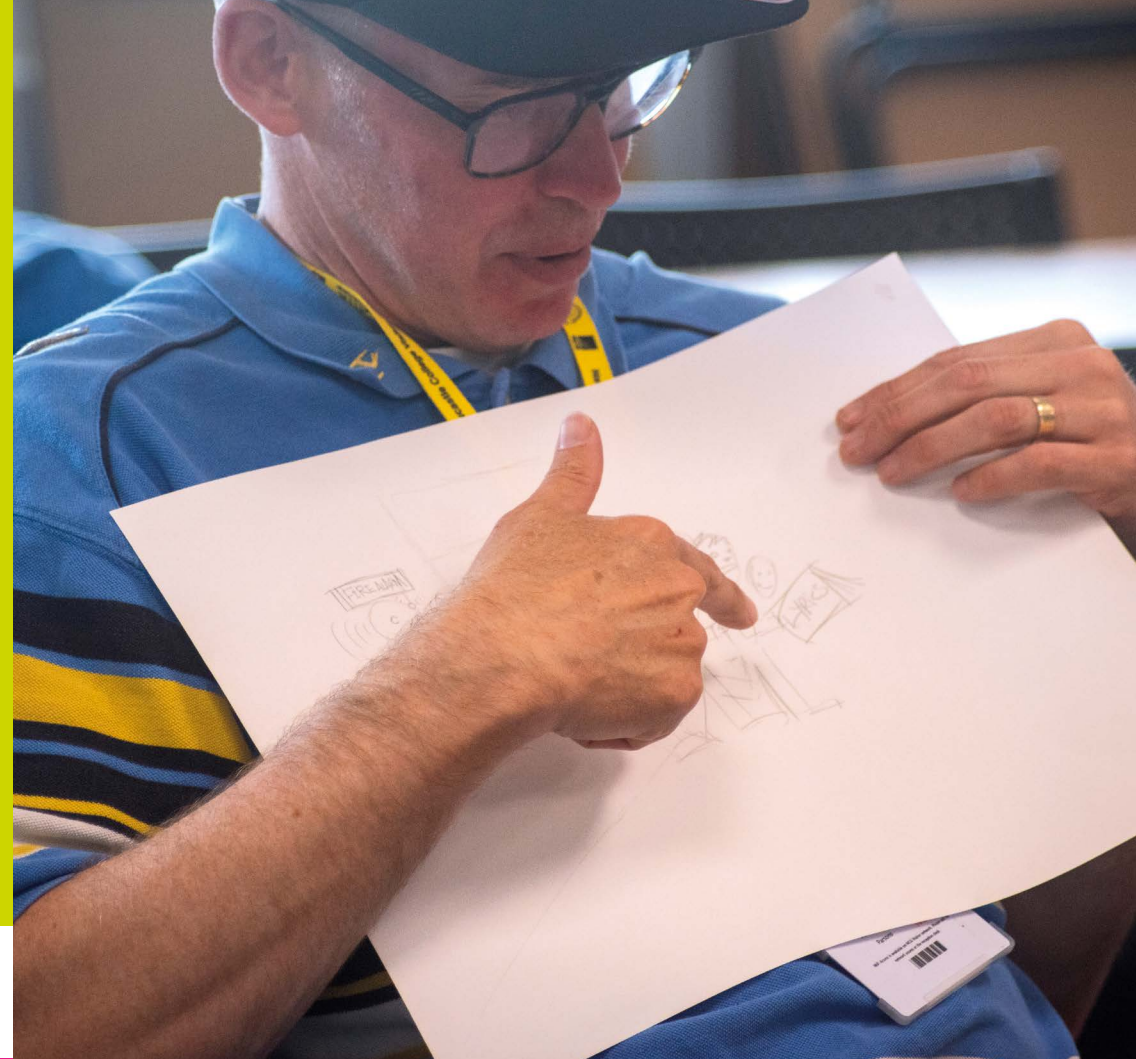
brought together the artist-practitioners and educational professionals working on the projects to explore and capture learning.

Valuing the role of creative practice, considering the environment where the project is based, understanding the role and responsibilities of artist-practitioners and educational professionals, listening to the perspectives of young people and being flexible and adaptive emerged as key factors in shaping the experience of both adults and young people. Positive relationships based on respect, empathy and compassion enabled each of these elements to have a positive impact on the projects. This report sets out the findings from the GLOW Creative Connections research, accompanied by resources that can be used by practitioners planning creative wellbeing projects with and for young people.

Screen prints made by young participants during their visit to Northern Print Studio, Newcastle upon Tyne.



CREATIVE ACTIVITIES



OPINION CONTINUUM

Describe the creative activity

Young people are asked to think of a light-hearted statement that will divide opinion. The artist might start with a simple example like “dogs are better than cats” and points to two separate areas of a room to represent “agree” and “disagree”. The space between these two locations is the continuum and young people are asked to position themselves based on their response to the statement.

The artist can then ask the young people to explain why they have chosen to stand in that place and allow others to challenge their reasoning. Young people are permitted to change their position if their opinion changes. As the game progresses, more thought-provoking topics can be introduced such as “money can buy you happiness”.

What materials or resources are required?

- A large, open space or classroom with furniture moved to the side

What is the purpose of this activity?

This purpose of this activity is to encourage critical discussion and reflection and for young people to develop their opinions and ideas, understanding that perspectives can change.

This activity can generate ideas and content to be explored further through a

creative medium, such as rap or poetry, and gives young people agency over the themes and topics that are explored.

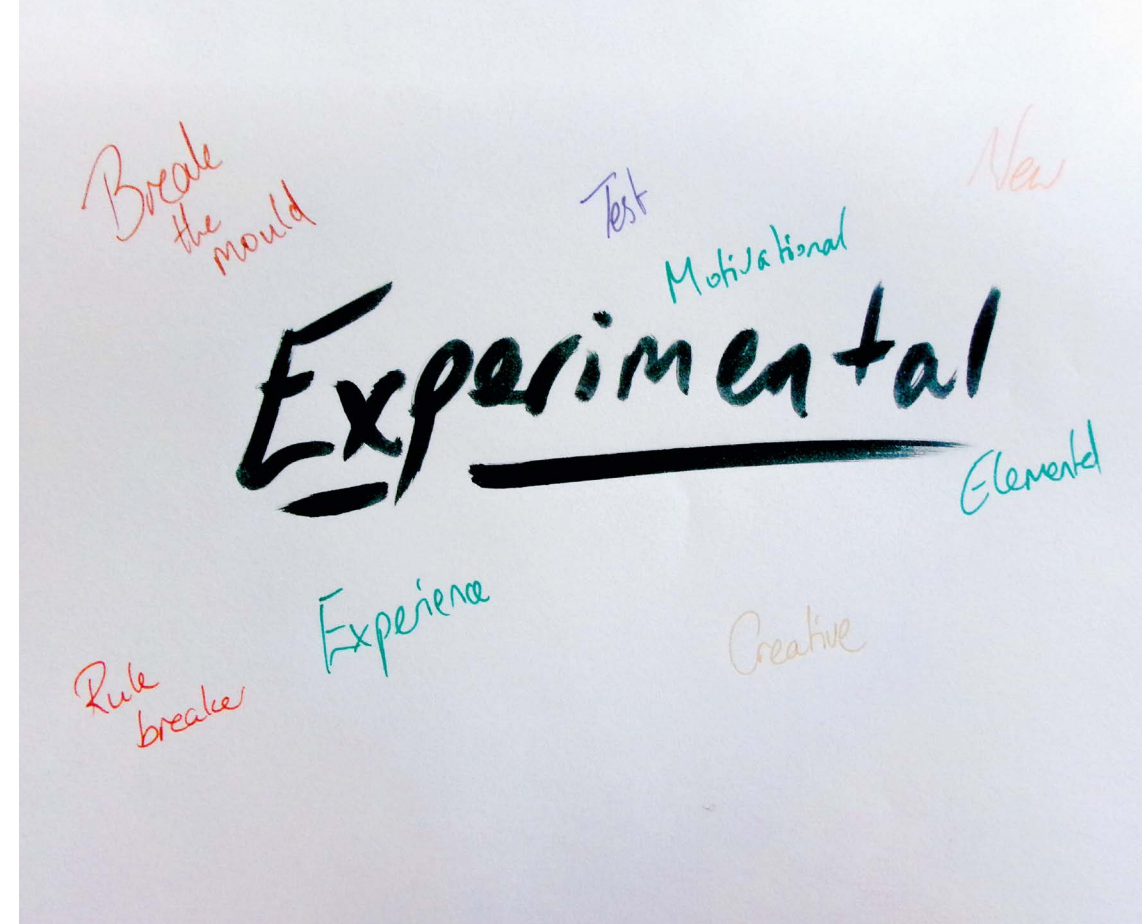
What might artists and teachers facilitating this activity need to consider?

The activity requires the adults in the room to have an understanding of the group, and the topics that may be distressing so it can be facilitated with sensitivity, prioritising the well-being of the young people taking part.

The artist makes sure everyone's voice is heard and encourages respectful dialogue and disagreement. This can develop trust and important social and communication skills.

How can this activity be developed?

The themes that are generated through this activity can be used for lyric writing exercises for example, the opinion continuum can form the basis of a “battle rap”, a type of rapping performed by two or more performers that often incorporates boasts and wordplay. It can also be used as an ice-breaker at the start of a project.



Rap battle lyrics,
work in progress.



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PHOTOGRAPHY

Describe the creative activity

Using smartphones, young people can explore and document their local area through photography. This can be guided by a series of creative prompts such as “texture”, “natural beauty”, “decay”, “urban”, “space”, “history”.

The aim is to encourage reflection about how places shape our identity, through close observation and engagement with the local environment. The activity invites young people to look beyond the familiar, to find unexpected details or meaning in their surroundings.

What materials or resources are required?

- Smartphones or digital cameras
- A list of visual or thematic prompts
- Access to local outdoor spaces for exploration
- Facilities for printing photographs

What is the purpose of this activity?

This activity aims to deepen young people’s sense of connection to place and their ability to notice, interpret and respond to their surroundings creatively. It promotes mindfulness by focusing on overlooked details in the environment and builds confidence and agency as young people choose what they want to capture, edit their own images and use metaphor to express ideas that are important to them.

What might artists and teachers facilitating this activity need to consider?

Not all young people have access to a smartphone or data so artists and teachers may need to provide alternatives or lend equipment where needed.

Artists and teachers will need to ensure young people have access to safe spaces where they can take photographs. Young people may have complex relationships with their environment so facilitators will need to be sensitive when discussing the concept of “place” and give young people the choice to focus on positive, neutral or abstract imagery.

Prompts should be discussed so young people understand how to interpret them, and artists and teachers may need to offer gentle scaffolding to help spark ideas. It is important that the emphasis is on exploration and experimentation rather than technical perfection.

Young participants enjoy collaborating on screen print designs.



How can this activity be developed?

Photographs can be printed and used as the basis for a follow-up mono-printing workshop. Young people can select images, translating them into expressive prints that layer texture, form and narrative.

Young people may also like to do some creative writing exercises based on their images or create a collective map to show where each photograph was taken, sharing different perspectives of place.

Photographs, prints and writing could be combined in a handmade zine for young people to keep.



WRITE A LETTER TO YOURSELF

Describe the creative activity

Ask young people to bring a photograph of themselves when they were young. If they feel comfortable, ask them to tell the rest of the group about the photograph e.g. how old they were, where the photograph was taken and what they were doing then. Prompt them to reflect on what has happened in their lives since then, and any key moments they want to share.

Young people then individually write a letter to their younger selves, sharing advice and insight. The emphasis is on what young people have learned and the awareness they now have, encouraging them to be supportive and kind to themselves. The letters are then sealed in an envelope to be returned to each young person at a later date.

What materials or resources are required?

- A photograph of each young person as a child
- Paper
- A pen or pencil
- An envelope that can be sealed

What is the purpose of this activity?

The purpose of this activity is to facilitate self-reflection and to support recognition of the skills and experience young people have. It can be an opportunity to promote self-worth as young people can look

back on what they have accomplished and feel empathy for themselves, particularly if they have overcome challenges. Importantly, young people have control over what they choose to share.

What might artists and teachers facilitating this activity need to consider?

Young people may need support to find and bring in a photograph. This may involve reminders from the teacher, using a photograph from school or communication with adults at home.

Teachers, who know the young people well, should work with the artist to judge when to run this activity. It requires young people to feel comfortable within the group so should take place once relationships have developed and trust has been built.

When the activity is introduced, it is important for the artist and teacher to facilitate a conversation about what might come up and what will happen if young people share information that causes concern.

Both teachers and artists can facilitate and scaffold this activity by bringing in their own photographs and sharing reflections from their lives, ensuring young people understand how they can select important moments without having to share too much personal detail.

Young people generate ideas for podcast content.



How can this activity be developed?

An extension of this activity could be asking young people to write a letter to their future selves or from their future selves to themselves now.

Teachers could also use this activity to support the transition from primary to secondary school.

The themes that emerge from this activity can be explored further through a creative medium such as film or animation, using metaphor to explore emotions and ideas, and giving young people the opportunity to share aspects of their identities they are proud of.

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