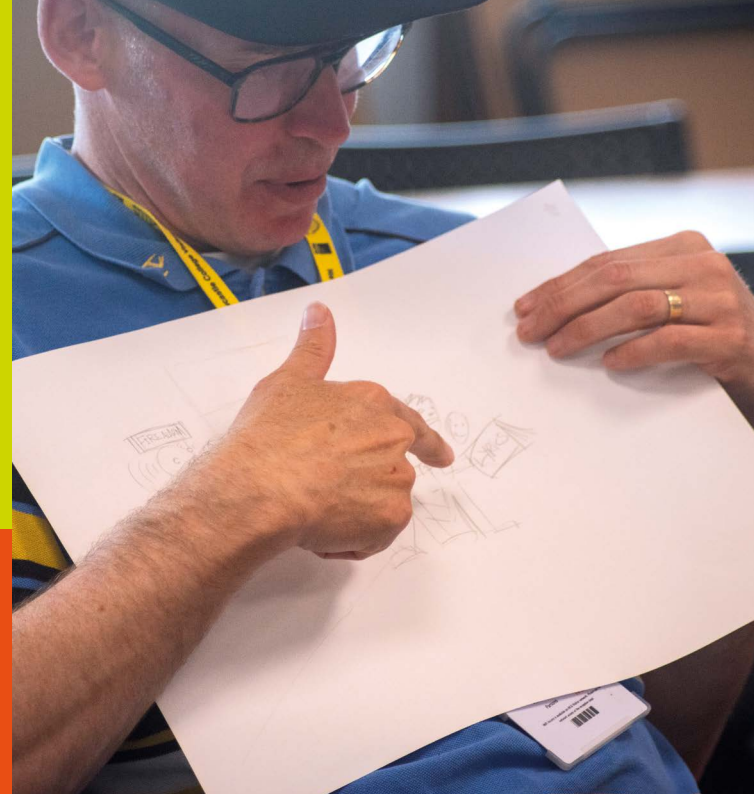




GLOW
NEWCASTLE



CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

2025



CONTENTS

- 3 Introduction**
- 4 Background and Context**
- 5 Methodology and Ethics**
- 7 Case Studies**
- 11 Findings**
- 15 Creative Activities**
- 18 Acknowledgements and Thanks**
- References and Further Resources**



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.

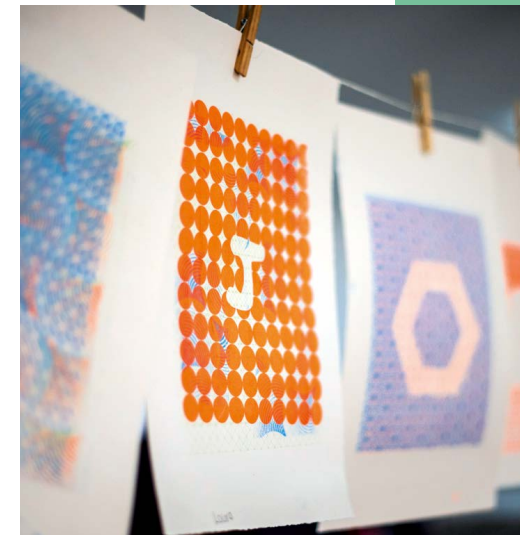
Glow Creative Connections is an action research project funded and supported by the North East Combined Authority Excellence in Education programme led by GLOW Newcastle. The project seeks to develop understanding between artists and educational professional working on projects that aim to support young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



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The social and emotional wellbeing of young people is in decline, with increasing numbers experiencing social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) challenges. In the North of England, where nearly a third of children are growing up in poverty, the mental health of young people has significantly deteriorated since the pandemic⁷ with rates of mental health problems increasing as children get older¹.

While young people's wellbeing is now recognised as a priority within schools, the education sector continues to face significant pressure. Reduced resources and growing demands on staff time can limit the capacity of schools to respond effectively to the mental health needs of young people. Increasing numbers of young people are no longer able to access mainstream education, with exclusion numbers rising year on year and those receiving free school meals and with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) disproportionately represented in alternative provision settings¹¹.

In this challenging context, the arts and creativity can play a powerful role in supporting young people's wellbeing, allowing young people to process and express emotions that might be difficult to articulate verbally³. Creative activities have also been shown to reduce stress, promote mindfulness, build social connection and belonging⁵. For young

people, who may struggle in traditional academic environments, the arts offer alternative ways to succeed, feel valued and develop a sense of agency over their own story and how they want to express and represent themselves.

Despite growing evidence supporting the positive impacts of arts and creativity on wellbeing^{2,5}, opportunities for creativity in education have been significantly reduced across the curriculum⁹. Whilst evidence suggests that creativity is essential for problem-solving, social development and resilience¹, the current education system focuses heavily on knowledge acquisition and academic outcomes, which can limit opportunities for creative learning⁹, risk-taking and exploration.

There is growing interest in approaches that bring together the education and cultural sectors to support young people's mental health and wellbeing. Collaboration between schools, artists and cultural organisations can enhance the learning environment and provide broader opportunities for young people to express themselves, explore their identities and develop positive relationships².

Young people generate ideas for podcast content.



METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS

Over a six-month period (between February and July 2025), artist residencies were set up in in three different educational settings with young people aged 11-19 years old: a secondary school, a further education college and an alternative provision. Staff and young people were involved from the outset. They decided on the art form and were involved in recruiting the artist-practitioners. Artists were selected who had specific experience of working on creative projects with young people with SEMH challenges and were trauma-informed and supportive in their approach.

The artists and educational professionals then co-designed a timetable of regular creative workshops and activities. The aim was to use the projects to explore how artists and educational professionals can work together to support young people's well-being.

Creative Connections draws from the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is based on a commitment to exploring a topic through engagement in self and collective reflection and through building collaboration between stakeholders in the planning, implementation and dissemination of the research¹³.

A researcher, along with artist-practitioners, named members of staff

from each of the educational settings and GLOW Newcastle's Programme Manager and Director took part in four Action Learning Group (ALG) sessions, each lasting 2-3 hours, at different points across the project. Two of these workshops took place in person and two were facilitated online on Microsoft Teams. Workshops included a combination of group discussions and activities to encourage dialogue and critical reflection. The themes and topics for each ALG were developed in response to previous workshops and research visits to the educational settings. The ongoing reflections of artist-practitioners and educational professionals were also captured through a short survey on Microsoft Forms that was completed after each artist workshop.

Whilst the focus of the research was the working practices of the artist-practitioners and educational professionals, it was also important to include the perspectives of the young people taking part in the projects. The researcher visited each educational setting to observe activities and speak with the young people. Where appropriate, the researcher took part in creative activities alongside the young people and chatted to them about their lives and interests with the intention of supporting young people to feel comfortable before having a

more formally structured conversation/ interview.

As the well-being of the young people was the focus of the projects, flexibility was applied to the different settings so that the research could be carried out in a way that was sensitive and respectful to the group's needs and did not disrupt the projects. At the secondary school and college, the researcher was able to speak with each young person individually to talk about the aims of the research. Young people were provided with an information sheet and had the opportunity to ask questions about their involvement and seek clarification on any aspects they did not understand. The young people who were willing to take part in a structured conversation with the researcher, gave verbal consent and signed a consent form. These conversations then took place during future visits and were either audio recorded or captured with notes, depending on the preferences of individual young people.

At the alternative provision, many of the young people were on short-term placements and their attendance and engagement with the project was inconsistent and unpredictable. There was also a high degree of dysregulation, which could be made worse by the presence of unknown adults. It was therefore decided that the involvement of the researcher had the potential to

add a layer of distraction that was not helpful. The experiences of the young people at the alternative provision were documented and reflected on by the staff and artists facilitating the projects, which is a significant limitation, and it is important that the findings are interpreted within this context.

The research findings are presented across themes that emerged from the ALG sessions with the artist-practitioners and educational professionals. These are summarised in a series of recommendations, along with case studies and sample activities designed to support the planning of creative well-being projects for young people in educational settings. We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the educational settings, young people and artists to this project however, quotes, activities and examples are not attributed to named individuals to protect the anonymity of some of those involved

Across the report, we have tried to use simple and accessible language. The term "teacher" is used interchangeably with "educator" and "educational professional", but we acknowledge that not all educational professionals teach. Similarly, we use "artist-practitioner" as well as "artist" but recognise their important role as a facilitator of participatory arts activity as well as a practicing artist.

CASE STUDIES



ART & CRAFT AT A FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE

A group of nine young women aged 16–19 years old, enrolled on a Level 1 course at a Further Education College, took part in a project incorporating clay-modelling, printmaking, bookbinding, painting, photography and creative journaling with an artist.

The group had been identified as being at risk of disengaging with education and training, and the department wanted to offer them new experiences that would re-engage them with learning and reignite their personal ambition.

The young women came from a variety of backgrounds, but many described negative or traumatic past experiences of school. One said that teachers at her secondary school were only ever interested in the clothes she wore rather than who she was as a person. College staff said that young people often arrived with low self-esteem and a lack of interest or confidence in education.

A range of full and half day workshops were delivered by the artist, combined with trips to cultural venues. During each workshop, the artist introduced a range of materials and activities, and gave the young people the opportunity to choose what they took part in. The young people said they appreciated this as it gave them the opportunities to “see some examples, do a practice”, “in our own time” and then “seeing what you’ve made and feeling proud”. Some young people were inspired

by simple craft activities they could replicate at home “I’ll be doing this every single day” one young person said. It was important for the artist to be intuitive about when to leave activities open-ended and when to offer direction so that young people felt supported. As the project developed, she introduced more questions and statements for the young people to discuss and critically reflect on to encourage them to think about things in different ways.

A key challenge for the artist was the mindset of the group. All of the young women had experienced low self-esteem and were fearful of failure and being exposed. Despite some initial reluctance, staff felt that through the project, young people had been able to discover skills they didn’t know they had, and this made them “more willing to have a go”. The artist noticed that when outside the classroom, for example whilst walking to the cultural venues, the young people talked more openly. By the end of the project the participants would look forward to the workshops and arrive early. They expressed pride in their work and had made new connections with people and places in their local area. For example, one said that having been introduced to Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, she returned the following week with her family.

A small teaching team supported the artist workshops and took great care

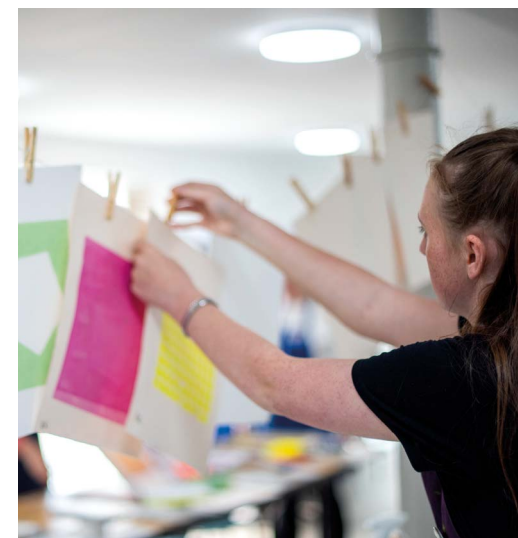
to ensure that every young person felt valued. Teachers were highly invested in the project, taking part in creative activities alongside the young people and participating in a professional development workshop delivered by the artist. The young people said they hoped their teachers had been inspired to “introduce new ways of learning things”.

The teaching staff recognised the value of relationships and promoting self-care to build confidence, perseverance and resilience. From the teachers’ perspective, this involved being attuned to young people’s individual needs, knowing their personal circumstances and challenges and being ambitious for their futures. The artist spent time getting to know the young people in the group. Young people’s ideas were incorporated throughout the project as they were asked about the art forms and practices they were interested in trying.

Creative activities explored the self, feelings and narratives through painting, drawing, textiles and clay work. These activities prompted the young people to think about how they viewed themselves and how they wanted to be viewed by others. Many of the activities were deliberately mindful; they could work on

things at their own pace and talk to each other through the process of making. One young person said, “in my other lessons, I stress out”, “everything feels too much” and “I don’t tell anybody”. In relation to taking part in the creative activities with the artist she said, “it helps you relax, which is good for your mental health”. The students made objects they could take home and keep, such as clay pots and ornaments, decorations, cards and journals. This gave them a sense of accomplishment and achievement. One young person said the best part of the project was “making everything out of clay. I made flowers, a candle holder, a vase and a clay strawberry”. Another said, “I feel confident in what I can do”.

A young participant hangs their print work to dry during their visit to Northern Print Studio in Newcastle upon Tyne.



“It helps you relax, which is good for your mental health.”

FILM & MIXED MEDIA IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

A film and mixed media artist partnered with a large-inner city secondary school in North East England. A group of eight young people aged 14–15 years were selected to take part in the project. They came from different school years and friendship groups but were all “mental health champions” in school and supported younger pupils with their mental well-being. The lead member of staff assigned to the project was a school counsellor.

The artist’s intention was to give young people experience of a range of creative skills and practices, whilst building group cohesion and social connection. School staff wanted to raise the profile of the mental health champions in school and create “opportunities for young people to work with people they wouldn’t normally get a chance to work with” and for the group to get an insight into “what is out there”.

Through weekly workshops, the artist ran a range of different activities that aimed to get the group thinking, discussing and making. The timing of the workshops changed during the project, due to limitations of staff time and concerns that the young people would be missing too much if they were regularly taken out of lessons. “Teachers can get frustrated when learners are being taken out of the same lesson over a number of weeks” one of the

teachers said. Workshops were moved to the end of the school day, which meant that the young people could choose whether they took part and this changed the dynamic of the group as they had a sense of ownership over their participation.

During workshops, the young people often had a choice of two or three different activities so they could do what they were comfortable with and interested in. They said that they felt listened to and respected by the artist “he lets us say our opinions instead of just telling us what to do”. The creative activities had a gentle well-being focus; they often centred around thoughts and emotions and encouraged the young people to reflect on their own experiences and identities. As the project developed, the artist introduced activities that enabled the young people to celebrate and feel proud of their uniqueness.

“It’s more interactive. It’s like, stepping away from basic education to work together and do different activities that you wouldn’t usually do.”

The member of school staff who was involved in the project had a particularly positive relationship with the young people who were taking part, which shaped their experience “if it was different teachers, it would have felt

different. I might not have felt as open to talk about how I feel”.

The artist worked hard to break down the unequal power dynamic between adults and young people. The young people appreciated that they were trusted to use the artist’s filming equipment and that they were allowed to listen to music and chat during the workshops. They said that this created an environment where they felt able to express themselves.

“Everyone is on the same level. He is not superior to us.”

“I like how there is no judgment.”

“I like how he lets us listen to our music. I really appreciate it.”

“There should be more groups like this for kids who have things to say but don’t know how to say them.”

Whilst the young people appreciated the relaxed environment, they could become distracted by their phones. The artist said that he found it difficult to reset and change the rules once the project was underway. This highlighted the importance of developing shared ground rules at the start of the project.

Finding appropriate spaces within the school building during curriculum time could also be challenging. On one

occasion, the artist turned up to run a workshop in a room that was set up for exams with signs that said, “do not move the tables”. The member of staff working on the project, also found it difficult to manage the demands of her everyday duties alongside the project and often felt that she lacked the time needed for conversation and reflection with the artist before and after a workshop. The artist and teacher worked hard to overcome these practical challenges, finding new spaces and working collaboratively to ensure the young people had a meaningful experience.

Young people generate ideas for podcast content.



MUSIC & SELF-EXPRESSION AT AN ALTERNATIVE PROVISION



This flower was drawn by a young participant when they felt able to sit down and work with the artists.

Two musicians, specialising in rap and hip-hop music, worked within an alternative provision for young people who were at risk of, or had been, excluded from school. The provision aims to be nurturing and trauma-informed, offering a route to re-engage young people in their education and prepare them for their next steps.

The alternative providers wanted offer opportunities for the young people to express themselves creatively, and to develop positive relationships with new adults and each other and thought that working with a hip-hop artist would be relevant and engaging for them. The artists wanted to use music, lyric writing and conversation to give young people space to explore and share their interests and ideas.

The young people who took part in the project were on short-term placements at the alternative provision, so attendance was inconsistent. The artists usually worked with two small groups of 3-5 boys and girls aged 11-16 years for approximately an hour per week.

Key members of staff, who knew the young people well, were always present. Teachers were mindful of the dynamics between young people and offered

alternative activities such as cookery if some young people found it difficult to be in the group together or did not want to engage.

Open conversation to spark curiosity and dialogue was a key element of the approach that the artists took to working with and building relationships with the young people. As one of the artists stated, “small talk is big!”. Activities were facilitated with playfulness and humour, which broke down social barriers and opened up conversations they may not otherwise have had. The artists brought and shared their expertise and equipment and were flexible and adaptable to what the young people wanted to do each week.

Teachers felt that having the consistency of the artists coming every week was really important for the young people. Only after several weeks of activity did some young people feel comfortable enough to take part. These types of engagements may not seem significant but were important moments for some young people, who could find being around unknown adults challenging. This is illustrated by a young person drawing a flower when she felt able to sit down with the artists and work with them.

Most weeks, the artists were introduced to new young people, who had arrived at the alternative provision. This made building relationships and

planning progression in the project challenging. The young people who did engage, knew that their time there was limited, which could make them more distracted and unsettled. It is important in projects such as this, that sufficient time is allocated for the artists, young people and staff to develop confidence in working together.

Artists and teachers said that effective partnership working was a key element of delivering creative projects in alternative provision settings. It should not be assumed that artists have the necessary experience and confidence to deal with some the social and emotional challenges that young people in these settings can present with, as a result of their past experiences. It was helpful when teachers had positive relationships with the young people, engaged as active participants and role models and intervened to offer support when needed. Teachers emphasised the importance of artists having empathy and compassion and to “come in with an open mind” rather than a set goal.

“Small talk is big!”

FINDINGS



FINDINGS

How can teachers and artists work together on arts projects that support young people's well-being?

Across the three projects, artists and teachers collaborated to create inclusive, engaging and supportive experiences for young people. Their different areas of expertise were used to plan, adapt and reflect on how creative activities can support young people's well-being. Effective communication and early collaboration helped mitigate common tensions that can arise in participatory arts projects, such as differing expectations and priorities between school staff, artists and young people. Involving young people from the outset and ensuring mutual understanding helped to establish a shared purpose. The following sections summarise the specific aspects of this collaborative working and learning from these projects that can contribute to successful, wellbeing-focused arts projects with/for young people.

Valuing Creative Practice

A shared understanding of the value of creative practice underpinned successful collaboration between teachers and artists. For the educational professionals, an important aspect of the projects was engaging in activities beyond the classroom that would raise aspirations and strengthen their social networks through meeting and working with different people. Taking part in these projects, and particularly working with external artists and Cultural organisations, some young people felt less constrained by "right" and "wrong" due to the open-ended nature of much of the creative activities. This can significantly boost a young person's self-esteem, particularly if they have felt unsuccessful or undervalued in more academic educational environments.

Artists designed creative processes that encouraged young people to explore their identities, express feelings and emotions and connect with others, often through metaphor, play and improvisation. This open-ended approach enabled young people to communicate complex experiences on their own terms.

Teachers also benefited professionally and personally from observing and experiencing the creative approaches and ideas introduced by the artists. In the further education

college, staff were able to participate in training and visits, which strengthened their links to the cultural sector as well as their knowledge and confidence to embed more creative methods in their practice. Where the educational settings recognised the broader value of collaboration with creative practitioners, they were more likely to allocate time and resources to ensure the projects were meaningful and had a lasting impact. However, overcoming pressures on staff time and school budgets also requires policy changes that give the creative arts greater value within the national curriculum.

Understanding their roles and responsibilities

Artists and teachers have distinct and shared responsibilities in facilitating creative processes that support young people's well-being.

Teachers provided essential knowledge of the school context, and the young people involved. Their participation, when it was attentive and attuned to the needs of the group, modelled engagement and supported young people to participate. Teachers also shared important contextual information about rules, expectations and dynamics within the group, which helped the artist to tailor their approach to the setting. Having the same member

of staff or small staff team, support the organisational aspects of the project and attend workshops, established consistency and minimised disruptions.

Artists, as external professionals, were able to get to know the young people without preconceptions. Through inclusive activities such as ice breakers, games and discussion, artists created informal and supportive environments where young people could explore their interests and make choices.

Shared responsibility for the projects was important. Both teachers and artists contributed to setting the tone, sustaining engagement, supporting progression and responding flexibly when plans needed to change. Being aware of how their actions and decisions, as well as external factors, influenced the group helped to maintain a supportive environment for creative expression. When both were present, the environment was more conducive to emotional safety. Artists and teachers reflected that longer term collaborations, rather than one-off workshops, allowed for more meaningful projects.

By considering the environment you are working within

It is important to recognise how creative projects are influenced by the educational environment. The school day is carefully organised with routines and rules that govern behaviour, which can pose challenges for artists, who may want to work in a less structured and more responsive way. Artists highlighted the importance of building trust and being flexible within these constraints, alongside sharing their own values and ways of working.

Practical issues such as the availability of suitable spaces and the timing of workshops had a significant impact. Artists often had to adapt to the limitations of the setting, while teachers played a key role in facilitating access to appropriate spaces and negotiating timetables.

Involving young people

Across the projects, young people were involved from the outset. Their involvement included deciding on the artform and recruiting the artists. This meant that they were interested and felt a sense of ownership over the projects from the start. Involving young people in the initial planning and development of projects as well as responding to their opinions and perspectives on taking part is a key aspect of projects that support well-being to ensure they are done *with* rather than *to* young people.

Supporting young people's creative agency involved setting clear expectations and offering flexible

opportunities for participation. Artists discussed the importance of understanding and having early conversations about what was acceptable within the educational environment in relation to language and content to avoid needing to change or restrict creative outputs later. Activities were open and adaptable to allow space for individual expression, the development of collective ideas and young people's input helped to shape the direction of the work they were creating. Facilitating this type of engagement enabled young people's capabilities to emerge and be acknowledged. This initial engagement was more limited in the Alternative Provision setting because, as explained earlier the participants changed from week to week for reasons outside of the artists' control.

Being Flexible, Adaptive and Responsive

Flexibility and responsiveness were essential to the co-created nature of these projects. Artists used active listening, acknowledged different contributions and maintained a supportive and open-minded approach. This allowed the projects to evolve in line with the young people's needs and interest.

Throughout the projects, the adults involved were thoughtful and reflective about how their behaviour could affect young people's experience. Focusing on the process rather than the outcome and encouraging young people to experiment and take creative risks helped to inspire curiosity.



Young people generate ideas for podcast content.

Artists remained open to what emerged through the creative process, rather than being fixed on a predetermined outcome. This involved balancing a clear shared purpose with a willingness to adapt activities and timelines when necessary. It was also important that artists and educational professionals were ready to signpost to different organisations and services to offer routes to progression and support.

By building positive relationships based on respect, empathy and compassion.

These elements are all underpinned by positive relationships. Across the three projects, partnerships between teachers, artists, and young people enabled an atmosphere of trust, openness, and mutual respect.

When educators and artists worked in partnership, they could respond more effectively to young people's emotional and creative needs. Relationships were strengthened by shared goals,

consistent communication, and a recognition of each other's expertise. For young people, meaningful and respectful interactions with adults supported their sense of belonging and well-being in the projects.

Conclusion

This research has focused on how artists and educational professionals can collaborate in the development and delivery of creative projects that aim to positively contribute to young people's well-being. Building on the existing evidence base, future research could focus more specifically on the elements of creative practice that support well-being. A key finding from this research has been the need for sufficient time to do in-depth planning and relationship-building, considering the needs and interests of the group, to allow the creative practice to be foregrounded rather than overshadowed by environmental, contextual or relational dynamics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Aspects to consider when setting up creative projects with young people

1. Develop a shared purpose

Agree at the start why you are undertaking the project to develop mutual understanding and aid planning.

Consider the assumptions that you might be making about the value of creative practice or the young people taking part and think critically about how they may influence your project.

Ask the young people you are working with what they are interested in, giving them options and choices and the opportunity to get involved in key decisions.

2. Invest time in planning and reflection

Clarify roles and responsibilities, valuing the different knowledge and experience that everyone involved is bringing to the project.

Rather than focusing on outcomes, make time for a thorough planning of how you will work together, including agreeing how you will communicate and

reflect throughout the process.

You will also need to make sure you have the right resources in place including time, staffing capacity, spaces, materials and budget in case relevant opportunities arise during the project.

Planning between artists and teachers should also include sharing contextual information about the setting and young people.

3. Consider how to support young people's well-being

Get to know the group, making sure everyone is included and heard, so activities can be tailored for them. This builds trust and positive relationships, which are essential for well-being. Consider taking young people out of the classroom, to experience new environments and get inspiration and ideas.

Embed social-emotional learning into the projects by introducing activities

that encourage self-expression, explore emotions and identity and build empathy and social connection.

Ensure that you are appropriately trained/experienced and don't require young people to engage in activities that may feel unsafe for them. As you get to know your group ensure that there are choices about how they can engage and what they choose to share through artistic activities.

Be prepared for what may emerge during creative activities that explore the self and ensure you know how to signpost young people to further support.

Teachers should make artists aware of any policies and procedures in place to keep young people safe, including the educational setting's safeguarding process.

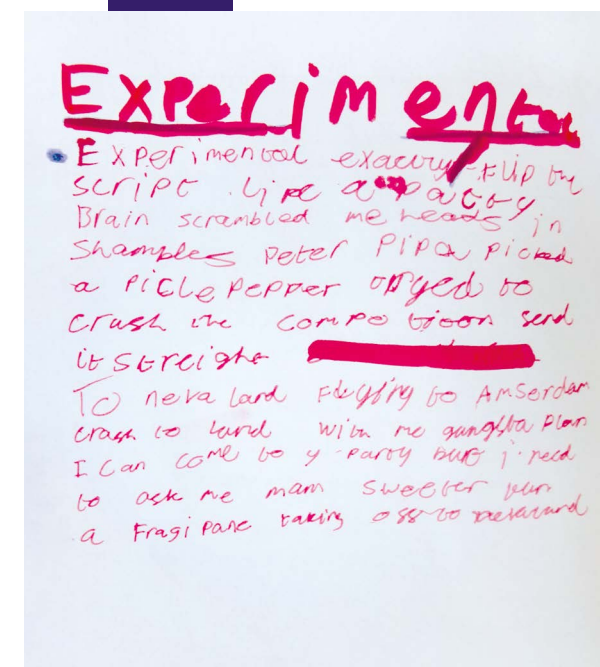
4. Have an open mind

Understand that arts projects can be messy and unpredictable and you may need to be flexible and change your plans. Enter the process with an open-mind and willingness to try new ways of working.

5. Professional development and mutual Learning

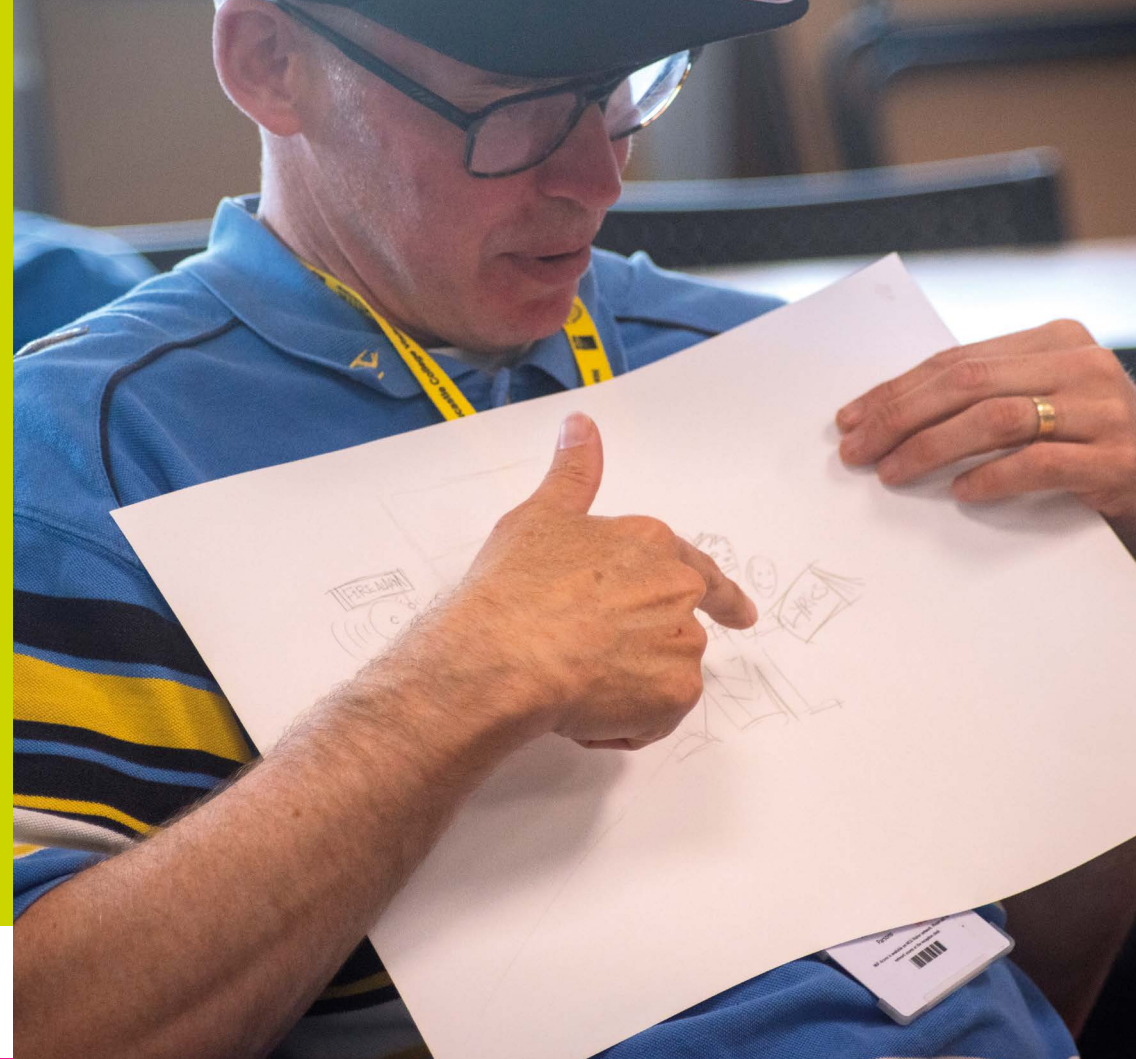
Discuss opportunities for professional development and training to integrate creative practices in the longer-term.

“There should be more groups like this for kids who have things to say but don't know how to say them.”



Rap battle lyrics,
work in progress.

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.

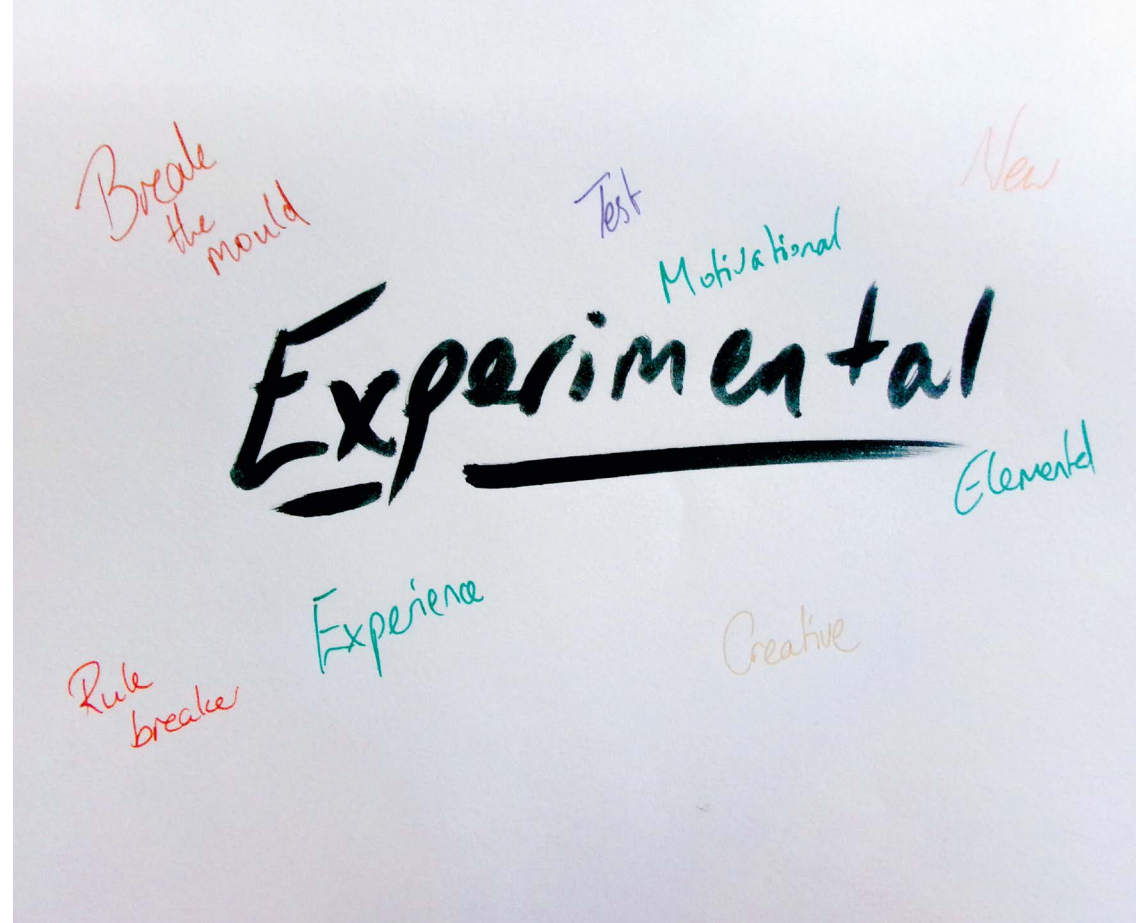
What might artists and teachers facilitating this activity need to consider?

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.

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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