

MAPPING CREATIVE JOURNEYS

ACTION RESEARCH REPORT
MARCH 2023

Disseminating
mapping process
in creative
subjects / Personal
Development

How can we use
Arts to support
communication?

- SEND / EAL.

Difference between
Art + Creativity...

- Parent Workshops
- Introductions
- Exploring
- Budget...



ABOUT THE PROJECT

The arts and creative education in the UK are in jeopardy to the extent that many schools are suffering from a 'creativity crisis' with art pupils and teachers down by one-fifth in the last ten years due to funding cuts ([The Guardian](#)). As funding cuts are imminent, therein lies an opportunity for arts organisations to fill the gap where many schools do not have the ability to deliver arts programming but often there is a disconnect between the educational needs of schools and the cultural offer from arts organisations. A New Direction's Cultural Education Partnerships (CEPs) are 'cross-sector, strategic partnerships that work together to unite and improve cultural education for children and young people in their local area' that aim to bridge this gap though not without challenges along the way ([A New Direction](#)). As each of these CEPs made up of arts organisations, councils, artists, and school representatives is responsive to local needs and serves their communities differently, each CEP needs to find the way their role works best for young people in their local area.

Mapping Creative Journeys explored the role of Cultural Education Partnerships (CEPs) in the Royal Borough of Greenwich to develop a deeper understanding of how they could be a bridge between schools and arts organisations, focusing on the needs of schools as a starting point. The project utilised a youth-led, asset-based action research methodology, further outlined in the next section. The project was led by project manager, Pragya Kumar and local artist Shermaine Slocombe, in collaboration with other CEP members in the borough of Greenwich, supported by researcher Dr Meg Peterson. The following outlines this pilot project in detail, followed by key learnings and next steps.

ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is a research method to 'help us build a better, freer, fairer society through collaborative problem analysis and problem solving in context' (Boden et al., 2015, p.3). This method adopts a social constructivist approach to research where reality is not an objective truth to be discovered but 'includes the way in which the people involved with facts perceive them' (Freire, 1982, p.30). This asset-based methodology supposes that people are experts about their own lives (Dedding et al, 2021). As a methodology,

Action research is social research carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action researcher and the members of an organization, community, or network ("stakeholders") who are seeking to improve the participants' situation. AR promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just, sustainable, or satisfying situation for the stakeholders.

(Boden et al., 2015, p.3).

Contrary to other, more conventional forms of research, action research also aims to take action or work towards a resolution to social problems, rather than conducting research for the sake of it or for more general theoretical knowledge development. Of particular interest in problems related to young people, youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) is an approach used to engage young people in enhancing the impact and relevance of youth-focused interventions. YPAR is an equity-focused form of community-based participatory research, placing youth voice at the centre of knowledge creation and analysis. This approach takes on the perspective that "the capacity for progress of our societies is based [. . .] on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future [...] taking on a 'spectrum of youth engagement ranging from youth as more passive "subjects"—to youth as actively engaging in and even autonomously leading research and transforming their environments' (Suleiman et al 2021, p. 27).

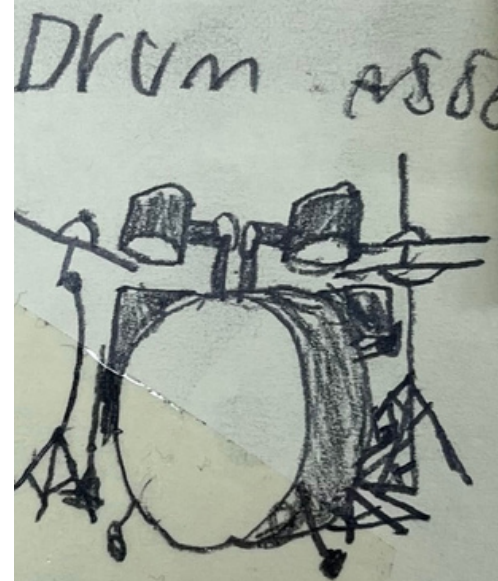
Working in this way requires a process of co-creation, or a co-operative process in which people with diverse experiences, skills and knowledge come together and work in non-hierarchical ways to address a common issue, and which enables people and communities to be actively involved in shaping the things which impact their lives. It shifts power, resource, and ownership towards the people the work is intended to benefit, as opposed to the traditional 'top down' approach, encouraging every individual to activate their creative potential and realise their own ability to make change (Walmsley, 2013).

THE NEED

Based on consultations with schools and arts organisations, it was agreed that a CEP could be a powerful tool to connect schools and arts organisations, though there is often a disconnect. Many arts organisations wanted to work more closely with schools but found that there were challenges in communication due to lack of time and lack of previous engagement. The schools have limited time and resources which makes it challenging for many of them to collaborate externally. Further, engagement with schools from arts organisations often felt tokenistic, with the arts organisations only contacting the schools when they had a fully formed project already, resulting in engagement that met their needs, not necessarily those of the school or even more importantly, the young people there.

In short, since the projects lack co-creation, the main beneficiary of the project, the young people, are not getting the benefits as per their needs. Therein lied an inherent need to find a way to foster more collaboration between schools and cultural organisations, directly based on the needs of young people in a school setting. It was evident through an initial research phase that the level of creativity and arts engagement in the majority of schools was dependent almost entirely on the expertise, passion and drive of the staff who worked there. This required a certain level of confidence on behalf of staff at the schools, yet if that confidence was not there, arts engagement and a general arts offer and the ability to apply creativity in other areas of the curriculum for pupils was generally low. Hence, there is immense potential for the arts organisations to fill that gap by providing an arts offer outside of the expertise of the school teachers and staff as well as the opportunity to upskill teachers based on those gaps, and even to work together to integrate more arts and creativity into the curriculum in other subjects.

Having given the opportunity of the action research, it is crucial to create a methodology to deeply understand the needs of young people in a school setting alongside the resources available and the skills, expertise and abilities of teachers.



METHODOLOGY

As the foundation for Mapping Creative Journeys, the research question was as follows:

What mechanism can be used to foster more collaboration and increased engagement between schools and cultural organisations to have a greater impact on the lives of young people?

The research project had a focus on identifying the gaps in existing partnerships between schools and cultural organisations and the challenges to form new ones. The action research was an opportunity to explore a methodology/mechanism co-created with young people to identify these gaps so effective partnerships could be built in the future.

In order to first understand how the methodology could be developed and scaled, a questionnaire was disseminated at a CEP seminar to gauge where the starting point for teachers and arts organisations was, and how the tool could be best developed and implemented. Twenty CEP members in total filled in the questionnaire. The key issues for collaborations between schools and arts organisations based on these findings were communication, time, and budget.

Communication- Arts organisations found it challenging to inform the school about an arts offer which would often result in a missed opportunity for the young people. Challenges in communication also made it difficult for schools and arts organisations to collaborate on projects.

Time- Given the existing workload, the schools found it difficult to build in the time for these creative offers. The time lost in making connections results in comprising the quality of the project. Time also affected communication and the ability to build new relationships between schools and cultural organisations.

Budget- The school budget cuts mean they have very limited budgets for art projects. They lack expertise to find the right funders and struggle to find time to write applications. Arts organisations also have limited budgets which is a barrier for starting new projects.

Once this initial process was complete and the data was analysed from those findings, a primary school was approached to test the methodology in development. 2 sessions were scheduled to test the tool which was based on an asset-based, co-created, youth-led action research approach. The session with young people included 10 pupils from a range of Years 3-6. There was also a session held with teachers using the same tool comprised of 4 teachers, including the Art Lead and an Assistant Head of the Senior Leadership Team. There was then a follow up session a month later after the data had been compiled for the teachers to be a part of the analysis process using the map from the young people as the foundation for a follow up session and next steps.

WHY ACTION RESEARCH?

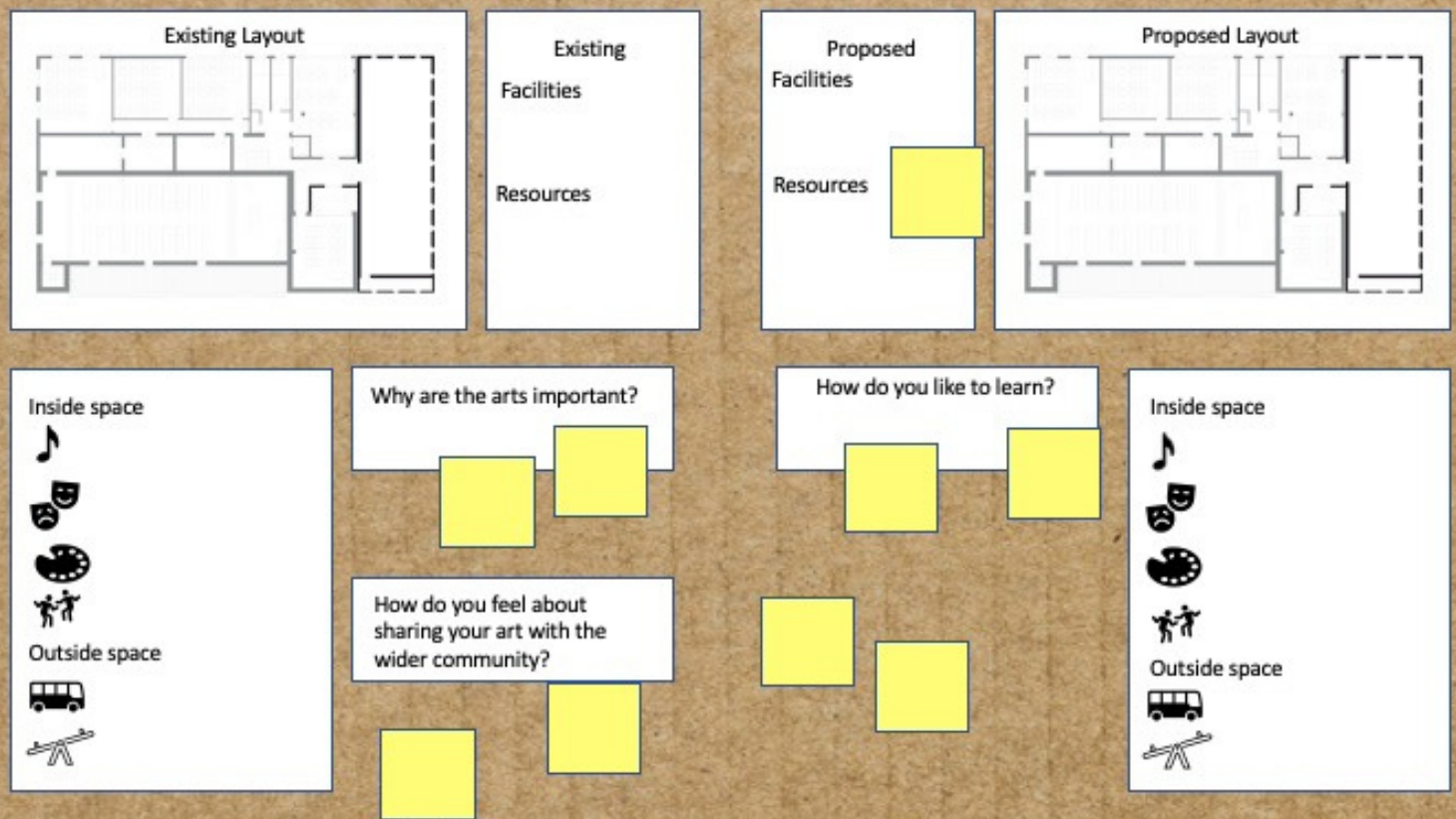


What was the benefit of this approach?

As mentioned in the previous section, Mapping Creative Journeys employed an action research approach, experimenting with the methodology which employed active research, engaging the future beneficiaries in the research design and process. Members of the Greenwich CEP, who are mostly artists and representatives from schools and cultural organisations, were actively involved in the research design process through conversations at meetings and through the initial questionnaire developed. As the project was being refined, they were engaged through an iterative process of design and sense-checking that led to the final tool being developed.

Pupils at the school were engaged in the research process through active data collection using a creative methodology and sense-checking, democratising the research process. Rather than making a judgement based on what the teachers and school administrators thought was best for young people as is standard practice, the mapping tool engaged young people in an interactive activity to help them to understand their needs and their interests to create something for them, by them. They were therefore engaged directly in the research process. As the research was focused on developing a way to determine the mechanism to gauge the needs and desires of young people, it was not necessary to go back to the young people and engage them in the analysis process so the teachers were brought together again to engage with the findings from the initial round of research.

THE OUTCOME

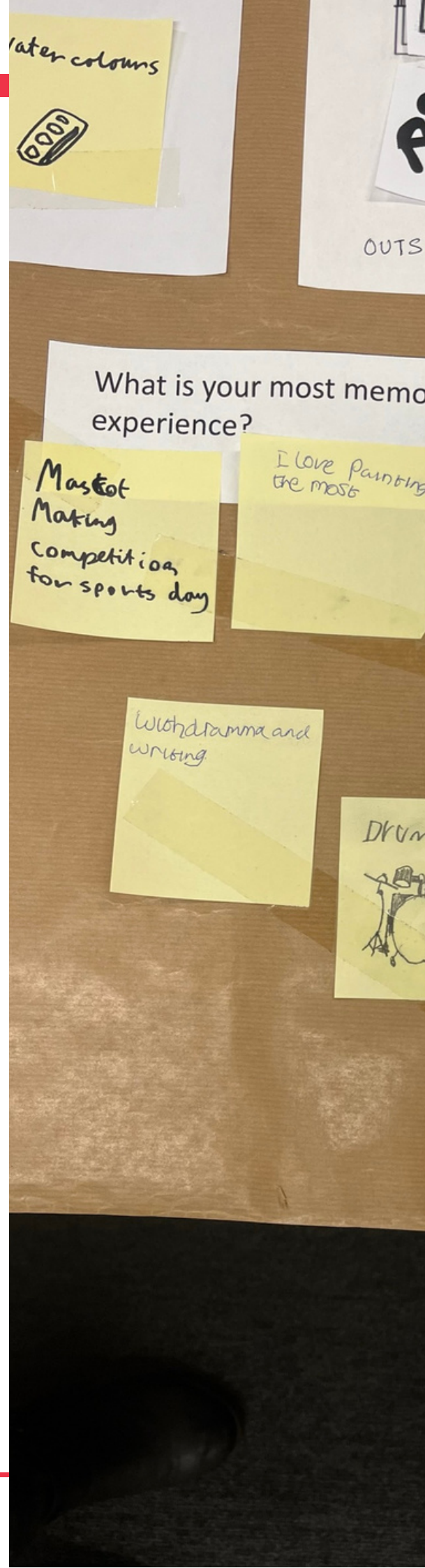



The young people's voice was built into the process through a creative and interactive activity specifically designed for a group of young people from KS2. In the workshop led by freelance artists, architectural plans of school were used to map the present arts offer and available resources and facilities in the school. This was then juxtaposed by a proposed layout to understand the creative interests of these young people. The process was engaging and the young people recorded their response to the current and future arts offers using creative tools such as writing, drawing and creating symbols. They also expressed their views about the importance of arts in their lives, memorable artistic experiences and about how comfortable they feel to share their work more widely. They discussed their past artistic experiences in school and associated themselves to different art forms that could be built into the curriculum to facilitate creative learning.

Though the impact of developing this methodology was limited by the small scope and timing, there is the potential for considerable long-term impact of the findings of this research are carried forward.

Action research demonstrated that effective communication and co-creation were the two essential tools to foster collaborative working and increased engagement between schools and cultural organisations, it also highlighted the need of a “creative advisor” as a bridge between the schools and the local cultural sector to strengthen access to opportunities. Every school will have a unique needs and requirement based on the diversity of the pupils within the setting. The research also highlighted the importance to develop a creative need assessment method similar to a learning assessment carried out at various stages to understand the support needed by the young people. This assessment should be a system based approach rather than people based. The method should be embedded within the school as an integral part of their assessment system. The data from this assessment can then be used by the school and arts organisations to identify the creative art forms that would help them to develop and deliver the creative curriculum. At this initial stage of the partnership, a creative advisor can help bridge the gap between the two sectors. These could be creative individuals or members from an arts organisation who has the expertise in co-creating art projects. They will work closely with the schools to develop:

- Creative need assessment methods
- Identify skill building/capacity building to support the teachers
- Connect the schools to the arts organisation/creative individual needed based on the assessment
- Share information of arts offer available in their local area
- Help identify funding sources and develop funding applications
- Develop a self-evaluation throughout the project to evaluate the impact and identify next steps





Utilising this method has the potential to build long-term, genuine partnerships between cultural organisations and schools which will result in sustained impact on all stakeholder involved. The benefits for each key stakeholder are as follows:

Young people- by implementing this methodology as the start of all creative projects based on the needs of young people, young people have the potential to be engaged in projects that are catered to their interests as well as being actively engaged in understanding the value of their creativity, building self-awareness. This uses methodologies rooted in youth voice, with young people themselves having a say in the education they receive. They also have the potential to have access to art forms or methods outside of the skillset and capacity within the school, exposing them to more tools to express themselves and be engaged in the creative process.

Arts organisations- for cultural organisations, this tool will help them to engage in a more sustainable, authentic way with young people and schools, with the potential to base their projects off of the needs identified in the mapping process. Through better communication with the schools and more collaborative engagement, it will be easier for them to engage with schools as the projects will be co-created. There is also increased access to funding for collaborative projects through building these relationships. From a creative perspective, findings new ways to engage with young people and schools based on the needs of young people also has the potential for organisations to stretch their creative muscles so to speak, applying the value they create through their activity to be applied in new and innovative ways. For cultural organisations, broadening the application of creativity to a wide range of people, especially those who may not have access or find it challenging to engage with the arts offer around them.

Schools- For schools, engaging more with cultural organisations allows them to engage in different areas of their curriculum that addresses their needs and fulfils their requirements to the government, but also has the potential to fulfil other needs such as engaging parents, behaviour management, socio-emotional skills, accessing cultural capital, ArtsMark, Arts Award, and more. Effective use of arts education, particularly in using creativity in non-arts related subjects, creates a case for the arts, building proof for how arts can be used more as a learning tool, empowering teachers with additional skills, develops an evidence base for the value of creative interventions and using arts and creativity as a learning tool. Through using arts and creativity to diversify the curriculum, there is the potential to better engage more students' learning styles alongside more socio-emotional learning. Schools have limitations to access funding but they can do so with a cultural partner, which opens up many possibilities for funding in this way.

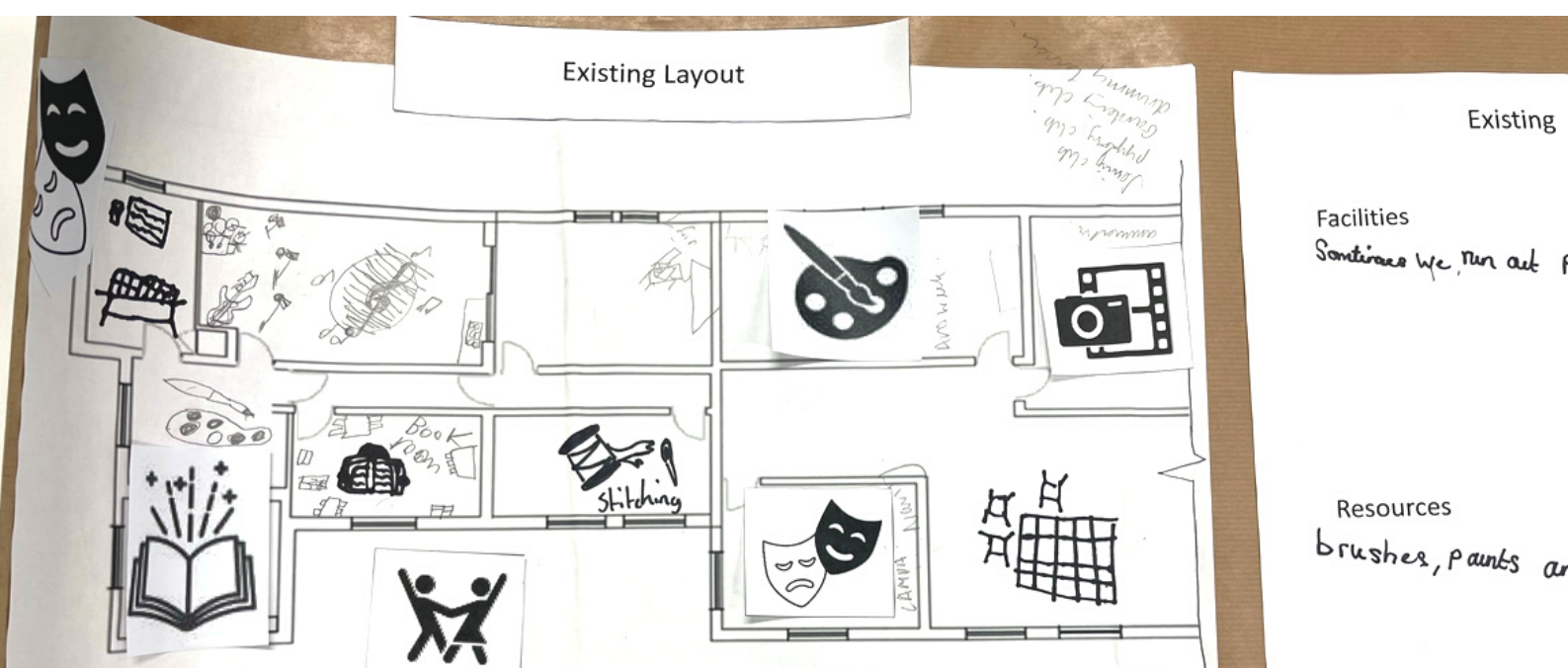
LEARNING

Through this project, the CEP learned there are gaps in the partnership, still finding its place as the bridge between cultural organisations and schools. As was evident in the initial phase of the research, the driving force with culturally rich schools is down to individuals, not the system. As this is based on individuals as it currently stands, the role of the CEP or some sort of bridge is crucial in assuring that individuals within a school environment feel equipped to engage with cultural organisations with the needs of young people as a starting point. While the creative needs assessment was a successful process with the young people who took part, the numbers were small so there is the potential to embed aspects of a creative needs assessment into learning assessments that already take place within the school system.

This project also allowed the CEP to work in a different way, learning more through the action research process as well as having the time to reflect on what is working and what is not working to operate in a more effective way as a CEP.

Limitations

The scope of this project was limited as it was a small test pilot and as there were many voices involved in the decision-making process, this made it more inclusive but also slowed down the effectiveness of actually implementing the project. The timing of the action research programme was such that the real start of the programme was the time when schools were going off for summer holiday, slowing down the engagement process until the autumn when they were back in session. Schools took a long time to get back about their availability and ability to take part in the programme which also slowed down the project. Overall, however, it was an effective, process-based learning tool that will no doubt have much larger and wider implications in the future.



NEXT STEPS

There is still a great deal to learn about not just the mechanisms for needs assessments but also the mechanisms for collaboration which is part of the next steps for this project. This project was the evidence of the importance of co-creating on a foundational level involving young people and now the next phase involves further developing the methodology. The following are a few next steps for the project:

- Scale up and test the methodology in more schools to further refine the methodology but also to build more connections in more schools in the process.
- Follow up with schools on impact/success of methodology in 6 months-1 year to see what has been implemented
- Write a funding bid to allow schools to better implement some of the findings and develop longer term partnerships
- Test the methodology with less-engaging schools, perhaps streamlining the methodology so that the process spans over a day rather than two separate days
- Further explore the role of creativity in education as part of a wider, holistic approach to curriculum design, including the arts but also outside of it.

Overall, this research has identified the gaps, but the next step is to bridge the gap through further refining the mapping tool and applying for funding to action the ideas that have emerged from the initial workshops.

Additionally, this project was tested with a school that already has a high level of arts engagement, though many of the projects are run by teachers in the school rather than external organisations. So, the school is already engaging in the arts though leans more towards a non-engaging school in respect to how they engage with cultural organisations. The pupils who took part in the workshop were also hand-selected as already having an interest in art, so would be useful to further test and refine the mapping tool with more young people who perhaps are not as interested in the arts to see what comes from that.

Next steps from the school

The school has also identified some key areas they want to focus on following on from this research. Internally, they want to find more space, time, staff, resources for projects; develop a system to assess need and targeted children, integrating creative need into school assessment system; and create a calendar of all the cultural offers in the community. In terms of external support, they would like assistance with outside funding, help implementing creative needs assessment in more classrooms; to develop long-term partnerships; and develop stronger links to CEP to know things going on in the community and understanding of local cultural offer. They also see the potential that working with cultural organisations has to better engage SEND and EAL students.

KEY FINDINGS

Based on this research, the following are a set of recommendations for next steps and ways forward:

1. Schools can build creative assessment into the system to understand the need first using a youth-led approach to then know how to connect with arts organisations. At the moment, this is led by individuals in schools so could be more sustainable if integrated into wider systems that already exist.
2. This tool helps to lay the foundation but only through further investment and funding can more long-term, sustainable projects get off the ground.
3. Having a creative advisor in the school or based across a few schools can help them assess the creative need in their schools.
4. CEP can also be active in bridging the gap to build these connections based on the need where they can then take the lead. However, the role of a creative advisor either based at the school or CEP seems essential to lead to meaningful collaborations.
5. Arts organisations can access more funding to benefit schools and school can offer in-kind or financial match funding to support these applications.
6. Members of the Senior Leadership Team in the schools and senior members in arts organisations need to be involved in this process in order for it to be successful.
7. Collaboration is important to assess the need of the school to know how the arts organisation can fulfil that need
8. Many funders are focusing on the role of creativity for social change so there is potential here for cultural organisations to prioritise impact on young people and communities through deepening engagement with schools
9. Everyone can express and develop creativity in their life. Taking a more integrated, holistic approach to creativity from a young age is a way to foster this. Engaging with arts organisations is a way to do this though there are other ways that can be further explored through this methodology.

Next Steps

Develop long term partnership

Support with access to funding

Disseminating mapping process in creative space

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THANK YOU

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