**Title: Safe-spaces, support, social-capital: A critical analysis of artists working with vulnerable young people in educational contexts.**

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**Abstract**

This article provides a critical and thematic analysis of three research projects involving artists working with vulnerable young people in educational contexts. It argues that artists create safe spaces in contrast to traditional educational activities but it will also raise questions about what constitutes such a space for participants. It will then show that skilled artists often mediate dichotomous pedagogical positions, characterised by competency and performance. It will employ the metaphor of a trellis to illustrate how artists provide flexible structure and support whilst allowing freedom and growth. Finally, it will discuss the social impact of the arts through the lens of social-capital theory, highlighting the utility of the approach whilst also indicating areas for critical refinement.

**Keywords**

Artists, vulnerable young people, safe spaces, pedagogy, social-capital

**Introduction**

In recent issues of this and other education oriented journals, there has been a lively international dialogue concerning the potentiality of artists working in partnership with educational contexts, underpinned by an assumption that traditional pedagogical approaches fail to realise the creative potential of young people in general, and the vulnerable and excluded in particular (e.g. Grierson 2011, Jarvis 2011, Rix 2003,). There has also been an accompanying interest, supported by a growing but tentative evidence-base, linking the arts to social/health benefits (Clift et al 2009, DoH/Arts Council 2007, Staricoff 2004,). However, the field engaged with research into the arts, creativity and inclusion is far from clear and unified (Banaji et al 2006, Boese 2008, Craft 2005). O'Brien and Donelan (2008) indicate a need to temper a climate of advocacy with more critical discussion, whilst Pringle (2011) highlights the need to test assumptions about the characteristics of artists in schools. This article aims to respond to such critique by articulating with greater clarity the spaces, processes and resources created by partnerships between artists and educational contexts.

By drawing upon thematic analysis of several research projects and a critical review of the literature, I will argue that artists create different types of spaces to traditional educational contexts, which allow vulnerable young people greater access to pedagogical practices enabling them to acquire social, creative and critical skills. There is a longstanding debate that posits such pedagogical practices as competency-based, as opposed to performance-based, with the latter sometimes impinging on the former (Craft & Jeffrey 2008). I will resist this polarity by evoking the metaphor of the garden trellis to share examples of how artists negotiate pedagogical positions to provide direction and support whilst also allowing freedom and growth. Successful projects often refer to models of social-capital to explain the resources and skills developed by participants engaged with artists on longer-term projects (White 2009). I will support this notion but show how the concept warrants theoretical scrutiny and refinement.

**The Research**

The data shared in this article derive from three groups of projects. These are:

**Project 1:** A partnership between an arts organisation, one primary (1a) and three secondary schools (1b-d). At each school, pupils were consulted about how to engage an artist to work with a group of vulnerable peers over several weeks to improve the school environment. Sculpture was created at two schools, mosaic artists worked with another group on school signage and a theatre-designer helped transform an unused room at the other school. The project, co-funded by the Department for Education, Nottinghamshire Targeted Mental Health Services and Arts Partnership Nottinghamshire, is described more fully in Sellman with Cunliffe (2012).

**Project 2:** A partnership between a global education centre and 12 special-schools (2a-l), which involved creative practitioners working on projects lasting 1-6 weeks over 3 years to promote global understanding through the arts and new media. The project, funded by Department for International Development, is described more fully in Sellman (2011).

**Project 3:** A 12-week partnership between an arts organisation, a primary school (3a), a secondary school (3b) and four residential care homes (3c-f). A sculptor and dance artist worked at the primary school on enhancing the curriculum for looked-after and other emotionally vulnerable children. A dramatist worked with another group at a secondary school, sharing the student's experiences with staff as part of a review of behaviour management policies. Two visual artists worked with four residential care homes to explore attitudes to education. The evaluation project, funded by The Mighty Creatives, is described more fully in Sellman (2012).

Pringle (2011) argues that the voices of artists are often absent from research and in each of these projects multiple perspectives were included. In all projects, participants, artists and educators were interviewed about the project's aims, process and impact. A range of multimedia accompanied the evaluation of individual projects (documentary filmmaking, project websites and audio-diaries for example). However, in order to keep the task of thematic analysis across the projects both manageable and coherent, this article reflects on interview data only. These interviews were partially informed by a review of literature. For example, I was eager to explore what Craft

(2000) refers to as domains, processes and people/resources. Yet, it was important that the agenda of the researcher did not override that of the interviewee. For this reason, an interview strategy was adopted, informed by Tomlinson's (1989) 'hierarchical focusing', which outlines an approach permitting both agendas. A topic schedule was thus created but this was subservient to interviewee's responses to open-ended questions and acted only as a guide for ensuring each interview covered similar important areas.

**Thematic analysis**

The composite of interview responses from these smaller projects constitutes a large dataset of extraordinary richness from a diverse cross-section of young people often termed 'vulnerable'. For the purpose of this article, vulnerable refers to children and young people in challenging circumstances affecting their mental health, experiencing special educational needs and/or looked-after. The opportunity was thus taken to undertake a thematic analysis of all of these projects for this article. Transcriptions were pattern coded for similarities whilst being attentive to important but ancillary points of view. This analysis was influenced by grounded theory, yet acknowledged that in reality it is difficult to discount previous research on a topic (Sturman 1999) and hence adopted a more iterative approach. The concept of 'safe space' was frequently highlighted by interviewees in relation to discussion about 'domains' and artists were keen to stress what this may mean for a vulnerable participant. The notion of flexible support, which evoked in my mind the metaphor of a 'garden trellis', was highlighted as one of the ways in which artists consider 'processes' and how they negotiate different pedagogical positions. In relation to discussion about 'people/resources', many interviewees highlighted a clear social impact on participants, consistent with a model of arts based interventions informed by social-capital theory. In the following sections, I will integrate interview data with a review of literature to share the insights of these projects and raise critical questions for both research and practice.

*Theme 1: Safe spaces?*

The theme of 'safe space' recurred within interviews across all projects. It was consistently stressed that the spaces and relationships created by artists were fundamentally different to other educational experiences (see also: Maddock et al 2007, Tranter & Palin 2004). O'Brien (2004) articulates a set of common characteristics that demarcate fundamental differences between artists and other professionals working with young people. She suggests that artists with appropriate experience, training, skills and expectations possess attributes ideal for working effectively with the marginalised and vulnerable. Maddock et al (2007) add that participants are more likely to feel trusted, they are given greater freedom and opportunities to ask questions, as illustrated by these successive comments from students participating in a focus group during project 3b:

> -Its been a safe calm environment, where nothing you say is wrong.
> -You can talk to each other about things.
> -You're not on your own.
> -And you're able to tell each other things that have happened in your life.

There may also be greater emphasis on process, instead of an instrumental focus on products. In such domains, young people are less likely to be told what to do and are encouraged to explore different ways of engaging and thinking, a point acknowledged by participants and teachers alike:

> Instead of shouting at you, she (the artist) helps you a bit more, they were like more relaxed than lessons rather than forced on to you… I feel more confident and able to speak up because usually you just get pushed to the side and everybody else chucks their ideas in, so we've all had a chance to get our ideas in (pupil, project 1c, author's addition in brackets).

> He (the artist) comes very prepared, he inspires them rather than forces them… (teacher, project 1d, author's addition in brackets).

Such accounts are welcome to advocates of the arts and social inclusion but a critical stance is warranted. There is a need to question what actually constitutes a 'safe

space' for vulnerable participants, and to what degree can an artist influence these spaces? Each of the projects reported in this article demonstrated merit but also had to grapple with issues unique to their own context, raising issues and further questions about the nature of 'safe spaces'. Here are some examples:

In project 1b (the creation of a 'chill-out' room at a secondary school), the regulative arm of the school encroached the safe space created when one participant was excluded from the project for a misdemeanour – they entered the space at break-time and helped themselves to refreshments intended for the whole group. For the consternate artist, this undermined the core educational and therapeutic objectives of the project for the sake of a demonstration of judiciary power. It also suggested that the project had been constructed as a removable treat, or respite.

Very different issues concerning safe spaces were raised by project 2, which involved artists working in special-schools on global education. In such domains, what counts as a safe space for pupils, artists and teachers was affected by a number of practical anxieties. Many of the participants experienced considerable needs concerning mobility, transport and personal hygiene. Any anxiety induced by an arts venue visit was amplified by worries about how the public may respond to these needs prejudiciously. Even well equipped venues struggle to cope with anything larger than a medium-sized group who may all require extra resources. Through collaboration it emerged that other special-education domains constituted safe spaces for these participants. For example, one school had recently been rebuilt with modern facilities and was better placed to host arts events than provision in the city. Hence, many such activities were successfully held there.

Participants from residential care homes in project 3 were initially resistant to working with artists about their experiences of education. They communicated that the 'home' was already their safe space and didn't want to talk about uncomfortable issues. The matter was further complicated by the artists feeling under pressure to produce a resource, which grated with their participants. The artists demonstrated considerable skill in mediating between these competing agendas.

In each of these cases, there is a need to anticipate and examine the nature of the spaces created (or infiltrated) and their impact upon participants. A key element here for project-design and policy alike is to move beyond what Cahill (2008) describes as the positioning of young people as either passive victims or in need of diversion and rescue. Participants are unlikely to locate solutions within themselves, or be positioned by professionals as possessing solutions, if they are shepherded into groups that have been clearly formed, no matter how disguised, by notions of 'risk'. The term 'risk' is often employed in the literature to refer to groups of people whose characteristics and/or circumstances crudely correlate with greater demand for state resources (e.g. benefits, health services, custody), hence preventative interventions are viewed as more cost-effective (O'Brien & Donelan 2008). When problems are localised around such groups however, Banaji et al (2006) warn that meta-narratives may be produced locating individuals rather than social-structures as the site of blame, alongside an unhelpful focus on the past rather than the future.

Mindful of such considerations, the artists from project 3b preferred the term 'comfortable spaces', as 'safe spaces' resonated with child protection issues, not to mention a tendency towards risk-aversion that would have been at odds with their creative practice. They also referred to such spaces as 'third spaces', where adults were not seen according to the polarities of causing problems or providing solutions, they elaborate:

> Safety is key but is difficult to make it genuinely neutral. A lot of children don't have this third type of space in their lives, they tend to experience chaos or control rather than a median (artist, project 3a).

The artist's role is advantageous here; participants generally did not perceive them as social do-gooders with all the answers, nor as educators making assessments of their performance. There was a tendency towards positioning participants as what Csikzentmihalyi (1999) would call 'co-creators'. When such roles are enacted, vulnerable young people are less likely to be regarded with sympathy or trepidation, and as resourceful rather than problematic (Rix 2003).

Such radical repositioning of pupils in educational contexts is a major pedagogical challenge. McWilliam and Haukka (2008, p. 662) argue that such 'creative capacity building should not be recognised as the reiteration of an oft-repeated call to a more student-centred approach. Rather, it signals a fundamental shift towards a more complex and experimental pedagogic setting'. Such approaches evoke spaces where educators and young people are co-creators, who ironically feel safe enough to take risks and may be uncertain of what learning lies ahead (Herbert 2010).

What emerges from these data is a case for the spaces created by artists working with vulnerable young people to be more genuinely inclusive (i.e. they are suitable for their needs), are neutral where possible (i.e. not polluted by association with regulative contexts), are self-regulating (i.e. beyond the jurisdiction of other spaces) and fully involve young people in defining the space and agenda. With these antecedents in place, artists and the spaces they help create offer a number of advantages to vulnerable participants for pursuing a range of objectives in a more open-ended and explorative manner.

**Theme 2: Support - The 'Trellis' as a pedagogical metaphor**

Artists working with schools can be characterised by multiple roles (e.g. outsider, role-model, collaborator) and ways of working, with variable assumptions made about the purpose of the project and whether there will be an emphasis on process, product or both (Pringle 2011). Though, Jarvis (2011) argues finished products of a representational or narrative nature, are prominent. Some researchers have drawn upon the theoretical legacy of Bernstein (Bernstein 2000, see also: Hall et al 2007) to contrast these different emphases as competence and performance pedagogies.

The former is characterised by seamlessness between the roles of teacher, artist and learner, alongside an emphasis on process, which is more important than an end-product. The participant is viewed as already possessing the necessary attributes to engage with the task.  There is a focus on the present rather than what may/may not be produced in the future and consequently, students exert greater control over the content, pace and sequencing of what they learn. In contrast, performance pedagogy is

characterised by explicit role-boundaries, highly demarcated stages of production toward an end-product or performance, which is higher in stakes when evaluated. Learning is future-oriented towards what will be achieved but becomes past-oriented afterwards. Although it appears these decisions are made by the teacher/artist, they too feel disempowered as decisions of content, pacing and delivery are often dictated by non-educators (Burnard & White 2008).

Competence and performance pedagogies make uncomfortable bedfellows, yet they co-exist because of parallel policy developments. The development of 'everyday' creativity is encouraged on one hand, whilst improved performance is encouraged on the other through a range of apparatus monitoring and controlling nationally prioritised standards (Craft & Jeffrey 2008). These competing agendas raise significant tensions for those concerned with creative and inclusive teaching and learning, with cases (e.g. Nicholl and McLellan 2008) where teachers keen to promote creativity succumb to performative pressures, finding even synthesis difficult.

Maddock et al (2007) describe teachers' anxieties of working with creative practitioners, who may work in seemingly less-structured ways. In their research, teachers often saw structure and control as central ingredients of their pedagogic practice and identity, in contrast to the stereotypical view of the artist, for whom relaxation of boundaries may be necessary. Educators may also feel uneasy about the risks taken by artists, topics explored and the material produced (Thomson et al 2006), even though Ofsted (2003) have praised lessons not so fixed. The cost of 'playing it safe', according to Troman et al (2007), is that the chance to ask important questions, undertake free investigation and learn from errors are forsaken for tight control in the classroom.

Without care, such debate tends toward polarity and overlooks attempts by artists and teachers to negotiate these pedagogical positions. Troman et al (2007) claim that the ways in which competing policy agendas are negotiated has been oversimplified and they attempt to unpack the complexity of multiple policy realisation. They share examples of educators stretching themselves to re-accentuate creativity within performative contexts. Jarvis (2011) and Maddock et al (2007) also share examples of

teachers moderating their practice after working with artists to incorporate 'process' into the limited spaces left by an agenda of accountability.

Across the projects reported in this article there were instances of artists working in ways starkly characterised by competence and performance pedagogies. However, it was also common for artists to shift between these stances, varying the level of structure, support and direction given, reminiscent of what Hall et al (2007) describe as a pedagogic repertoire. I will now share data showing how experienced and skilled artists actually shift between these approaches to offer support appropriate to the situation. I will use the metaphor of a 'trellis' to conceptualise this support, which provides structure whilst allowing freedom and growth.

It would be a mistake to conceptualise creative practice as exclusively process oriented, frequently characterised by free expression, experimentation and open-endedness as effective practice is also generally characterised by planning, pre-visualisation, research and critical reflection. Such characteristics provide barely-visible structure, like the rods and struts of a garden-trellis. Upon such a framework, a plant may derive strength, support and overall direction over a period of time whilst also being permitted some freedom. As a metaphor this represents the mediation of competency and performance reported by artists during interviews and audio-diary entries. The artists provided guidance towards an anticipated outcome but remained open about what this may look like. They provided intermittent support by giving reassurance when difficulties were encountered or by using responsive strategies such as renegotiating new challenges, teaching new technical skills and modelling problem-solving approaches. I will now share one of several accounts of how the trellis was enacted.

**Figure 1: Transformation of 'the chill out' room (project 1b)**

At project 1b, a group of pupils worked with a theatre-designer on transforming an unoccupied space into a chill-out room (figure 1). The young people made their own designs and acquired materials for the room under the designer's guidance. Whilst ultimately successful, the project encountered a setback. After the 'chill-out' room was painted to an initial design, the pupils were not satisfied with its appearance; it looked childish to many accounts and with the artist's support they went back to the drawing-board. Here is a pupil's account of what happened, demonstrating both pressure to produce an end-product, whilst still engaging with process:

> The first design was too childish, no-one really liked it, it had rainbows going all around the room, it looked too babyish and the room was meant to be for teenagers and adults… I felt we were in a tight spot, (pupil, project 1b).

Artists are used to dealing with such setbacks. Yet, vulnerable children and young people may find it difficult to navigate such obstacles. In this case, the artist was able to model problem-solving skills and communicate that it is perfectly normal to encounter problems and still succeed. Craft (2000) calls this 'possibility language', characterised by 'what if…?' questions, often used by artists and designers but also common to scientists, engineers and mathematicians. Artists can model resilience here and participants learn how to manage a difficult experience that may equip them with helpful skills for other situations. Artists from other projects explain how they also modelled these skills quite deliberately:

> You ask those questions about how can we move through this, what solutions could work, ok, that's not working, so what would work? (artist, project 1c).

> We model experimentation, finding solutions, visualising where this might be going, we are a role-model of having difficulties and overcoming them, its important for the young people to see this (artist, project 3a).

Such lessons are invaluable, Seligman (2003) highlights that greater long-term satisfaction is achieved by overcoming difficulties. Given this potentiality, arts interventions could deliberately incorporate planned setbacks into their design so participants experience and are shown how to manage this process. This is precisely the recommendation of Dweck (1999, p. 16) who argues that 'pedagogical work directed at improved learning outcomes would focus on creating obstacles that need to be overcome'. In such scenarios pedagogical stances may shift, an artist may encourage free-exploration at one moment, followed by modelling of problem-solving skills before rescinding the reigns again at another. Such interweaving of positions resonates with Burnard & White's (2008) call for a rebalancing of pedagogical positions, which places greater trust and autonomy with educators, allowing greater opportunity for collaborative risk-taking. Defining relationships between participants, artists and teachers as 'co-investigators' (Griffiths & Woolf 2009) or 'apprentices'

(Stanhope 2011) may encapsulate the appropriate balance between end-product and process required.

## Theme 3: Social-capital

Several authors (e.g. Ings 2004) have drawn attention to the potential 'soft outcomes' of arts interventions, including organisational, personal, interpersonal and analytical skills. Many have thus turned to a social-capital framework to theorise the impact of the arts (e.g. White 2009). Upon first inspection this seems like an unlikely pairing as 'high art' has often served as a marker of cultural elitism and means of differentiation between social classes (Bourdieu 1984). Yet, the arts have been credited with a civilising potential, based on an assumption that collaborative art making is inherently beneficial (Banaji et al 2006, Boese 2008). Shiriani (2012) argues that the concept of social-capital has political clout, popular with the right because it symbolises withdrawal of state-interference and equally popular with the left who regard the stimulation of social-capital as essential to welfare. For some (Banaji 2006, Boese 2008, Grierson 2011, Shirani 2012), such political co-option of artists comes at a heavy price, stripping them of their power to contest cultural norms and offer new insights in order to demonstrate economic and social viability. In contrast, Gablik (1998) states that artists should always be ethically concerned and socially useful.

The utility of the arts appears to rest on how arts engagement can shift the intervention focus from oneself to experimentation with materials and processes, and/or a broader collaborative goal, which creates opportunities for participants to acquire new social skills, positions and contacts at the same time (Cahill 2008). For White (2009), the social-capital obtained emphasises the sense of community cohesion that can be created through both improved bonding within an existing group and bridging with new contacts. There may also be the added benefit of greater awareness and trust of the social, health and cultural resources and services available within the local/regional area (Thomson et al 2011).

The concept of social-capital has been employed multifariously however and warrants critical scrutiny. Cahill (2008) states there is little evidence that involvement in the

arts actually leads to less exclusion or grater employability for young people. This is perhaps because the term has been appropriated from its original emphasis on how privileged individuals turn their social networks and cultural inheritance into economic power (Bourdieu 1984), rather than the 'social tonic' provided to vulnerable groups to help them improve the quality of their lives through increased participation (e.g. White 2009).

Attempting to build social-capital requires a cautious approach to group-formation. Cahill (2008) also refers to the danger of 'false-normalisation', which occurs when a group of people facing problems are bought together. Under such circumstances, bonding to a high-risk group lacking resources may be a problem rather than a solution. She expands that the problem here is not just that such grouping strategies can yield disappointing outcomes but rather they can actually be damaging. The critical mass of the group is centred around and reinforces 'problematic' norms (e.g. deriding the activity, rule breaking, community divisions), which can over-influence the nature, pace and direction of the project, further grounding challenging behaviours that any artist may find difficult to counteract.

Serious questions need to be asked about how groups are formed and Cahill (2008) argues for a normative alternative, where young people experience a more functional group and positive experience. Participants in project 1 were often aware of why they had been referred to the group, which could be cause for concern as the social-learning taking place could reinforce difference and decrease their sense of agency. However, there were cases when group formation around common need was a supportive and positive experience. For example, one could question whether it is wise to form a group solely of looked-after children, as in projects 3a/b. There may be genuine fears that such group-formation may increase their visibility to others, encourage them to become over focused on the quagmire of difficulties they share with each other, reinforce problematic lives and provide few useful resources for one another. However, project 3b was quite the opposite. Looked-after students working with a creative practitioner utilised the opportunity to voice their preference to be identified as a distinct group, at least to teachers and each other, and expressed their desire to continue their meetings as a support-group, contrary to teachers' expectations:

I've always gone along with the idea that looked-after children should be coming to school and senior managers and teachers should know about them as a group but that we should integrate them with their peers, they're not to be highlighted. What's come from them is that they don't want that, not in this school, they want to self-support each other and that has really surprised me (teacher, project 3b)

Pupils interviewed as part of projects 1 and 3 generally indicated a positive impact of working with an artist on both bonding and bridging forms of social-capital. Pupils were encouraged to talk about this issue by looking at a feelings-tree (Wilson & Long 2009), which shows a range of cartoon ('blob') characters at different positions on a tree, some isolated, some with companions, some achieving success, some not. Pupils were asked to reflect on where they felt they were on this tree at the beginning and end of the project, with the overall majority reporting feeling more proud of their success alongside greater social-contact, as these and later comments indicate:

I used to think I was the only person in this school that was in social-care and this group has brought us together and I know there are more people in this situation (pupil, project 3b).

Two girls now have a blossoming friendship, beforehand they were the target for some name-calling… now they've formed a friendship they're able to support each other, to seek help and are coming more to things like after-school art clubs (teacher, project 1c).

Today, the youngest girl in the group walked to school with the oldest girl and the reason this happened was that the oldest girl saw her and although she found her annoying she knew she wouldn't want to be on her own… She wouldn't class her as one of her friends but as one of her 'net', her responsibility… (artist, project 3b)

Such quotes, of which there were a considerable number, are testimony to a clear social impact. However, the concept of social-capital would benefit from a more

refined theoretical language to more accurately describe the kinds of attitudes and skills being acquired. It is unlikely that just being together with other vulnerable participants and an artist in a different space adequately captures the complexity of what is happening. This challenge has occupied Thiele & Marsden (2003), who specify how the acquisition of social-capital through the arts can impact on i) *possibilities* perceived and expressed by young people, ii) their *communicative ability*, and iii) their *critical engagement and imaginative capacity*. I will discuss each element briefly and in turn, with examples, to show how the concept of social-capital can be refined to describe more accurately the processes taking place.

*Possibility:*

A failing of interventions in the past has been a tendency to try and replace negative attitudes with no attitudes (e.g. stop offending). Clearly, this is implausible. Any successful arts intervention needs to replace negative thinking with alternative models and greater hope. It was Bruner (1986) who highlighted the power of arts education to create alternative realities, narratives and ultimately selves. One means of achieving this is to ensure that the participant is not the subject of the intervention. Cahill (2008) argues that such attention has negative consequences and participants better acquire coping strategies when they focus on something external.

There was a dramatic impact on what the young people perceived as possible at several projects, enhanced by a combination of inclusive processes and outcomes that surpassed their expectations.

> I feel happy because *WE* did it, the teachers helped us a bit with buying stuff but we mostly did it, we painted the room and its kind of life-changing for us because we've done it, we didn't think we could do anything like this…
> (pupil, project 1b, italics show pupil's own emphasis)

For some, such deep engagement was a welcome distraction:

> One student was very interested in drugs and drug culture and bringing it up a lot while chatting about ideas and that's just now gone, he's just more

interested in the project, drawing out floor-plans and coming to me to say I've done this design and I've got this idea and what about this shade for this wall and he just became more engaged in the artwork, perhaps leaving other stuff behind (artist, project 1c).

*Communicative ability:*

There was also evidence of an impact on young people's animation, evidenced by changes in both oral competency and non-verbal communication and empathetic relationships, as illustrated by the following quotes. Pride and willingness to trust are also of relevance here but are discussed in the preceding and following sections.

At the beginning, a lot of them were very quiet and verbally wouldn't share their ideas or share them with the group but by the end of it they were saying 'oi'– don't put that there and really interacting with one another… conversation opened up over the weeks, there was a lot more talking and making friends. (artist, project 1b)

Today, the youngest girl in the group walked to school with the oldest girl and the reason this happened was that the oldest girl saw her and although she found her annoying she knew she wouldn't want to be on her own… She wouldn't class her as one of her friends but as one of her 'net', her responsibility… (artist, project 3b)

*Critical and imaginative ability:*

According to Lindstrom (2006), a key feature of artistic and creative education is the teaching of key skills through investigative work, which requires participants to step into other's shoes, see different perspectives and critique other's creative products. Creativity is not seen as a private and individual process but located within a sociocultural context. Hence, reflexivity about the development of one's own work and empathising with those who may 'consume' their product, whilst sharing

concepts and feedback with others are crucial ingredients to critical and imaginative ability.

Different projects reported an impact on participant's ability to share and review ideas and to manage themselves within a group-setting, as the following point demonstrates:

> They did self-manage the group … All have adopted group roles and switched over the sessions, (artist, project 3c-f).

There was also evidence of individuals changing their attitudes willingness to trust to others by being asked to critically reflect on different viewpoints, for example:

> There's been a conceptual shift, children learned that other people around the world aren't all charity cases, they're not all victims of disaster and became more politically and ethically engaged… (teacher, school 2h)

> One young person's talked about she's changing her attitude to social workers, that by putting them in the role of a social worker and making them make the decisions that social workers have to make, she understands why its hard (artist, project 3b).

**Concluding discussion**

In the last section, there was clear evidence of a significant social impact for many vulnerable participants engaged with the arts. A refined language of social-capital helps articulate this change. The young people involved were given a boost to their confidence, generally enabled by working with an artist who allowed them greater opportunity to share and refine their ideas, further supported by producing and then celebrating something that surpassed their expectations. According to their own accounts, this gave them a greater sense of possibility regarding their own and collective abilities. It was also clear that the process of being deeply engaged with

collaborative art making enabled them to further develop their personal and interpersonal skills, though it was sometimes necessary for the artist to scaffold their experiences when they encountered difficulties. For many, there was also some development in engaging with and adopting alternative critical stances as their work or related issues were debated. Further research could thus investigate in greater detail how artists model language-use to participants and whether an extended project impacts upon their agency and expressive ability.

From these accounts, which can only be reported with brevity here, a strong case can be made for arts engagement being an effective vehicle for supporting the needs of vulnerable young people. In fact, their experiences appeared to compensate for previous poor educational experiences by creating situations where they were more inclusively and deeply engaged. The positive impact of arts engagement doesn't occur haphazardly though. The article has shown that artists create different types of spaces in contrast with traditional educational contexts, which allow vulnerable participants greater access to pedagogical practices that enable them to acquire key skills. However, there is much more to this than grouping vulnerable young people with an artist and letting the process run its course.

It was observed that artists create different spaces to teachers and generally these are more accommodating of vulnerable young people's needs. However, it was also apparent that the nature of safe spaces needs rigorous examination. A great degree of expertise and negotiation may be necessary to create genuinely 'neutral' spaces where the impact of artistic and creative processes can be fully realised. The data shared here would suggest that such spaces are often infiltrated by external power considerations, which where possible, should be kept apart. One element linking safe spaces to social-capital is group-formation. Some sensitivity needs to be applied here. A 'purposive' rather than 'normative' approach to grouping was common, which also warrants scrutiny. On one hand this potentially reinforces participants' identities as troubled and helpless but on the other hand there were also indications of such grouping enabling young people to bond and support one another. When the latter occurs, there will also be ethical implications concerning how the project winds-down and the types of support provided thereafter. It will be necessary then to anticipate and critically review the intended project goals and likely impact so that groups can be

formed strategically. Sometimes it may be necessary to take risks but participants should not have their difficulties reinforced and neither should they be helped then abandoned. A long-term plan for the sustainability of arts engagement in educational settings is essential.

There are considerable pedagogical implications also warranting more in-depth research. The kinds of engagement and impact reported here involve projects running for some time, well beyond the 'show and go' culture of one-off events and short-term curriculum augmentation projects. The pedagogical practices of artists are sometimes characterised as competency based, and frequently either at odds or overpowered by performance culture in educational settings. In the projects reported here, several artists were actually quite successful at negotiating competing priorities and synthesising inclusive and creative processes with the production of high quality outcomes. I would suggest that the metaphor of the trellis, described earlier, is helpful in conceptualising how artists provide both flexible support but also allow some freedom though this metaphor needs testing in various contexts. Nonetheless teachers as well as other artists may benefit from scrutinising how they synthesise such elements into their everyday practice in order to maintain both control and creativity. Many have suggested the need to re-conceptualise the relationships between educators, artists and participants as co-investigators and the trellis may be an effective way of formalising such relationships. Within such a model, the artist/teacher provides the overall support for creative enquiry, including risk-taking, but allows the young person to develop their own agency, agenda for learning and requisite skills. Again, further research could elucidate greater theoretical clarity about the impact of context on such processes and factors successful in mediating obstacles to deeper engagement.

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