

Sustaining Arts, Culture and Creative Experiences in Schools

Key Insights



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YORK
ST JOHN
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for
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Justice

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Reach
York Cultural Education Partnership



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Introduction

In September 2024, Reach and researchers from York St John University (YSJU) initiated a community research grant funded through the Institute for Social Justice. The aim of the research was to explore how children's holistic development in all schools in York could be supported through increased participation in arts, culture and creativity. This was addressed through facilitating a dialogue between Reach, arts organizations, school and council leadership and academia.

This dialogue was realized at a Creative and Cultural Education Research Day held on the 3rd February 2025 in the Creative Centre at YSJU involving schools, arts organizations, academics and the City of York Council. The aim of the day was to better understand effective arts education through:

- The needs and perspectives of schools (leaders, teachers and students)
- The needs and perspectives of decision makers



The Creative and Cultural Education Research Day was divided into morning and afternoon activities. In the morning four York primary schools engaged in an artistic research activity where they designed 'Angels of Hope' that reflected their opinions of the arts. In the afternoon members of arts organizations, City of York Council, school leaders and academics, and delegates from Draw with Denmark engaged in targeted discussion reflecting on the results from the school's artistic research in the morning and sharing their own ideas and opinions.

This document outlines the views, perspectives and insights that were shared at the event.

Artistic Research: 'Angels of Hope'

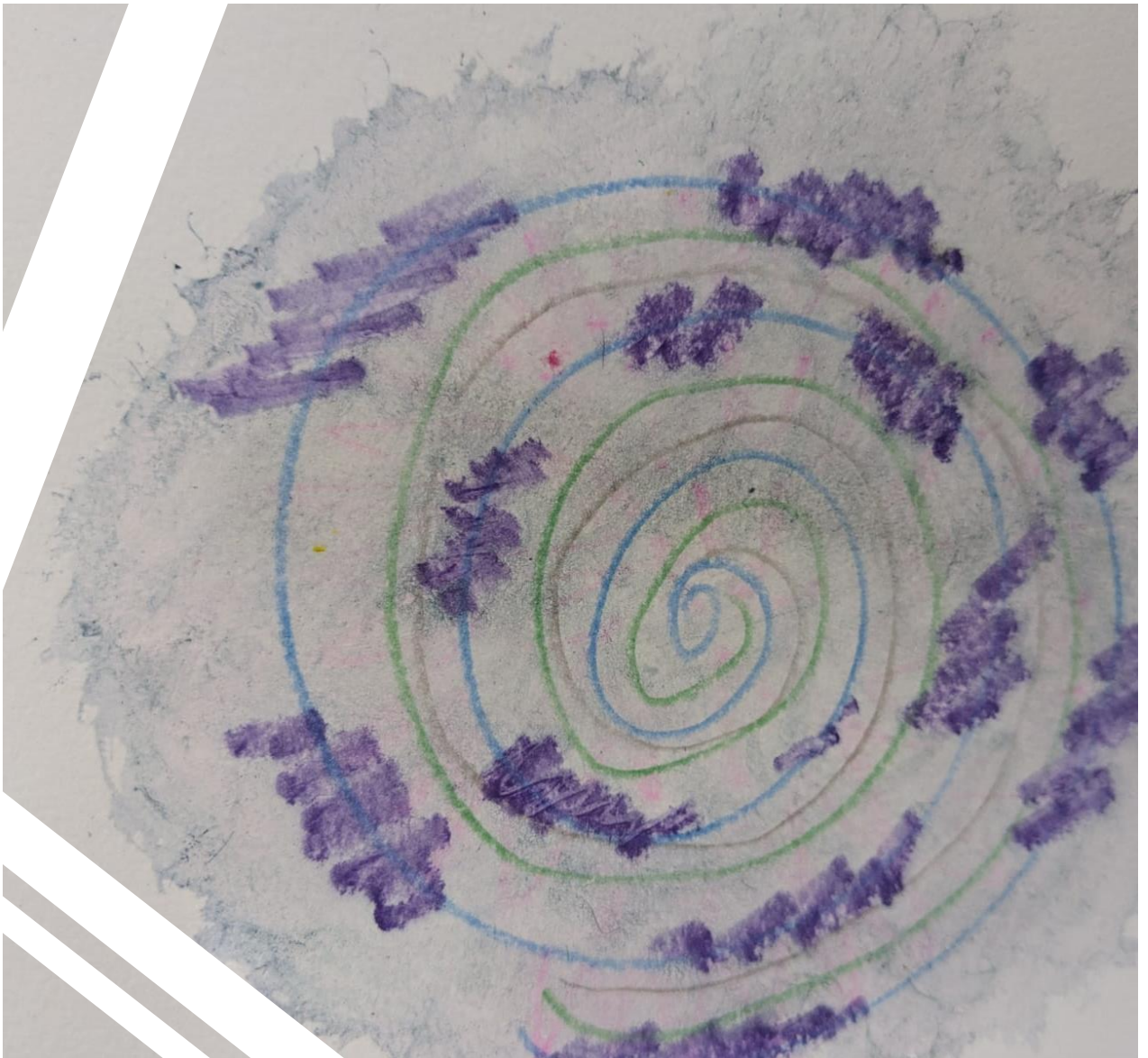
The morning activities were facilitated by local visual artist Hannah Turlington. Students and staff worked together to respond to three research questions through artistic creation using pastels, watercolour and prints:

- How does arts, culture and creativity make you feel?
- What is most important, or what do you care about, when making 'art'?
- How can we make it so everyone can have art, culture and creativity in their lives?

Each school created an 'Angel of Hope', an artistic research model used by Draw with Denmark.







Watercolour response:

How does arts, culture and creativity make you feel?

Happy
Relaxed
Delightful
Inspired
Alive

Excited
Calm
Human
Free
Fruitful



Pastel response:

What is most important, or what do you care about, when making 'art'?

Expressing yourself
Expressing my own opinions
Headspace
Connectivity
Getting messy
Being happy
Being proud

That I've tried
Messages
Creativity
Fun
What I do is good enough
Enjoyment





Print response:

How can we make it so everyone can have art, culture and creativity in their lives?

Free exhibitions
Free community activities
Free or funded art supplies
and equipment
More art lessons
Accessible
Cheaper
Artists in school
Diversity
Partnership
Visits
Role-models


Opportunities for families
in the local community
Community
Affordable
Time
Opportunity
Festivals and art parades
Quality
Community art fund
Experiences
Priorities
Equality



Decision-makers' Discussion

The afternoon meeting with council members, arts organisations, academia and school leadership created a space for discussion and connection between stakeholders interested in effective arts education in York. Four questions were posed to the participants who discussed each question in groups. We also invited Councillor Pete Kilbane, who holds the portfolio within the Council for Culture and Creativity, to speak about the City of York's priorities for arts education. Guests from Viborg, who were connected to the Draw with Denmark project, were also in attendance.

The following responses were analysed and grouped together according to a hierarchy of how often a phrase was repeated.



How might the hopes and dreams of the children and teachers depicted through the 'Angels of Hope' be incorporated into a city-wide arts education?

- Centrally shared resources and CPD
- Access
 - Increase access to professional artists (into schools)
 - Interventions need to be accessible to all levels of talent and interest level
 - Provide access to artistic resources (including free or funded transport)
- A broad and balanced curriculum where the arts are part of the everyday school experience.
- Regular opportunities for children and young people to share their views and be heard by adults
- Combine the arts, culture and creativity with a strategy for mental health and well-being
- Connect with local spaces and communities

To what extent do you agree with the statement ‘A city-wide arts education is the best approach for addressing the specific needs of a school’s community/local area’?

No.

- A city-wide policy may be too restrictive. A framework that supports the arts entitlement for every child is needed.
- Focus on specific schools needing this the most.
- There is already a strategy around arts education. Do we need an audit instead? What is working well? What are the barriers?
- A more targeted approach is necessary
- Share resources/rotate interventions around the city
- Build into what is already happening
 - Must link into existing priorities/priorities (e.g. mental health)
 - Build on international links that are appropriate locally.
 - Build on existing creative education strategy

Yes, but...

- As a baseline. Schools should build upon it through dialogue with children and the local community.
- A strategy needs to be prepared with teachers, cultural institutions and educational programmes.
- It has to go beyond policy to funding the activity.
- Who is accountable for ensuring pupils access excellent arts education?



How might a city-wide arts education support the council's priorities for children and young people?

- Remove travel barriers with grants (e.g. could the cultural passport include travel?)
- Open doors for young children locally (e.g. a library ticket)
- Consider the importance of being able to access local spaces
- Maintain and develop links between maintained sector and MATS
- Let children take over public spaces more often
- The strategy needs delegation and responsibility
- Provide CPD opportunities in arts, culture and creativity skills for teachers
- Less emphasis on outcomes, more focus on the process of creativity.



What community values underpin effective arts education?

- Art, culture and education as a process, not only as a product
- Belonging
- Equity, inclusion and a celebration of diversity
- Enabling children to feel, imagine and be inspired.
- A commitment to art, culture and creativity as a central element in a citizen's sustainable life
- Freedom
- Communal activity: talking together, sharing, the process doesn't have to have a product to be scored.

Key Themes

We identified the following recurring themes through the day:

Wellbeing

The children, teachers and headteachers emphasised issues relating to wellbeing. We noted this was not as much a focus during the decision-makers' session, suggesting this may be an area for further consideration in strategic planning.

Collaboration and connection

Both groups of participants spoke of the importance of including the community in creative experiences by using local spaces. The benefit of having artists in schools was highlighted as a means for students to work alongside industry professionals and envision a career in the arts as a realistic goal. Sharing resources was frequently mentioned with suggestions that schools work alongside CYC-funded organisations and that the arts sector be proactive in providing opportunities to schools. It was also noted that although the schools, councillors and arts organisations all valued arts education, they had different approaches and understandings of arts provision, suggesting the need to develop a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) with a shared repertoire (tools, processes and terminology that everyone understands).

Accessible interventions

Participants noted the need for activities that supported arts, culture and creativity to be accessible to not just children but their parents and teachers as well. Suggestions for how this could be done included paying for transport to events and activities outside the local area, developing a central local arts fund and focusing on the most deprived areas of the city.

Visibility, participation and accountability

The event highlighted the need for students' and teachers' voices to be part of strategic decision-making for arts, culture and creativity. Furthermore, the schools present wanted to receive recognition for the arts, culture and creativity provision they already offer, suggesting that a strategy for arts education builds on current activities. The need for accountability was also highlighted, with a recurring question surrounding who holds responsibility for the provision of arts, culture and creativity and a call for 'buy-in' to council initiatives.

Curriculum development

There was a call for a curriculum that allowed for arts, culture and creativity for all. Within this, it was highlighted that there was a need to focus on creative processes rather than the physical outcomes relating to arts, culture and creativity and its positive impact on wellbeing. At the same time, the demands of Ofsted and a curriculum that is already very full were mentioned as barriers to allowing more arts activities in schools.



Recommendations

Analysis of the Creative and Cultural Education Research Day yielded the following potential actions:

Wellbeing

Situate activities relating to arts, culture and creativity in relation to children's wellbeing; such activities are not only enjoyable but more importantly help children feel emotionally and socially centred.

Collaboration and connection

Integrate students' experiences with arts, culture and creativity in the wider community. That could include:

- Linking curriculum with current arts projects in York. Underpinning this is the ethos that creative experiences should be accessible to everyone in a community.
- Bringing artists in schools, building on existing creative expertise and allowing students to see a career in arts as a realistic goal. Whilst the arts sector overall is proactive in providing opportunities to schools, logistical or financial restrictions makes it challenging for schools to take advantage of these.
- Sharing resources. There are opportunities for schools and artists to work alongside City of York Council-funded organisations. Meaningful collaboration would likely need the space to establish effective communication and translation of ideas.

Accessible financial interventions

Allocate funding strategically to increase impact particularly on the most significant areas of deprivation within York. Areas for investment could include:

- A central local arts fund to be accessible to children, their parents and teachers.
- Continuing professional development for teachers to empower and upskill them in arts and creative practices.
- Bringing artists into schools as well as for transport to events and activities outside the local area.

Visibility, participation and accountability

Develop strategy around the arts, culture and creativity in an inclusive manner. This could include:

- Drawing on good practice in arts, culture and creativity provision currently being provided by schools.
- Meaningfully integrating students' and teachers' voices in strategic decision-making.

Curriculum development

Lobby Ofsted to reevaluate the national curriculum in two fundamental ways:

- Integrate arts, culture and creativity provision into the curriculum for all students.
- Focus curriculum on creative processes rather than products.



Emerging Questions

- Could schools be used over summer holidays for arts activities?
- How could children's work be more visible in York's art galleries, museums and theatres?
- How could the arts be brought into local communities?
- How could arts education be measured in such a way that the focus is on the process of creativity, rather than the outcome?
- What resources could be shared? How could this be achieved?
- What might an audit of current arts education look like? How might that benefit the city of York?



The research team would like to thank everyone who participated in the Creative and Cultural Education Research Day for their contributions.

A more detailed academic report and short video will be available on the YSJU Institute for Social Justice website or upon request by contacting Dr Sarah-Jane Gibson at s.gibson1@yorks.ac.uk.

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