

AEE Evaluation:

Top Line. Rapid review.

Questions to ask of the evaluation in relation to creative learning particularly:

1. What can we learn from the baseline data?
2. Does the data suggest developments in the social and emotional domain?
What are the key features?
3. Does the data suggest developments in the cognitive domain?
What are they key features?
4. Does the data suggest developments in the behavioural domain?
What are the key features?
5. Does the data suggest developments in skills?
Which ones?
6. What can we learn from the data about
Space
Time
Content
Method of approach at AEE?

1. What can we learn from the baseline data?

Although all different, the young people who attend AEE present a range of similar emotional and cognitive characteristics that impact on their personal feelings, social relationships, and their capacity to learn. Many (if not all) the personal properties of creativity appear absent or limited for the young people when they arrive.

A long list of the personal properties required for creativity is offered by Cropley (see page 60 of *Creativity in Teaching and Learning*). The students' baseline data demonstrate the lack of, or opposite of, these properties. For example, inner directedness is in contrast to 'a lack of motivation'. Ego strength is reported as 'lacking in confidence', openness is met with language such as 'withdrawn or resistant', risk-taking is its very opposite of 'staying in their comfort zones'.

The data present a portrait of YP profoundly affected by social and emotional complexity and trauma. They struggle in group settings and often require 1:1 attention. YP frequently feel isolated and withdrawn, unable to express emotions and lack agency. Fear, high anxiety, and low self-esteem are reported with clear needs for security, safety, and consistency. Behaviour is shown to manifest itself through frustration, disengagement, distraction, a lack of trust and a resistance to learning. The need to stay within known realms of knowledge and the inability to take on others' ideas is evident. Some data reveal a lack of self-care or value, a lack of joy, some defensiveness, as well as little aspiration or hope.

In short, the YP arrive with their creative capacities effectively muted at best, at worst in shut down, and with relationships that are vulnerable and can be few and far between with peers. This is not true of every YP, but the data show this is the majority.

Essentially the YP need to work with AEE to create a sufficient degree of trust, safety, confidence, and hope before they can really embark on creative projects to the full. That said, creative *learning* approaches when introduced *do support and grow this over time* as the evidence below reveals

2. Does the data suggest developments in the social and emotional domain? What are the key features?

The quick answer to this is yes, absolutely! Data suggest there is development for every YP, some move more quickly than others, but all benefit in some way. Some profoundly so.

Social and Emotional development is captured within the field of wellbeing and community. Words such as hope, joy, belonging, and trust are outlined as key words and are key aspects outlined in the templates to work on for and with the YP.

Overall, the data show that the programmes build social confidence, support relationship building and confident self-expression. Art and creativity are a bonding experience (over time) and offer inroads to emotional talk that would not be possible otherwise. Making and talking are successful, peer to peer learning and self-direction is imperative, *with appropriate*

scaffolding and support from staff. Data also suggest a high level of trust is developed, pride, joy and happiness are recorded with social relations sustained. There is a sense of belonging identified.

The key and repeated features that are articulated in the templates are Pride, confidence, joy, hope, trust, aspiration, management of emotions, motivation, and community. I'd like to look at the detail of the ways in which this is achieved with you, though for starters the way in which they YP and the staff communicate is obviously key, as is the nature of the selection of **content** to hone-in on specific emotional or social needs. The more specific that all the details become (space time content method) in relation to the changes sought, the more effective the work seems to be. Content=the level of emotional focus.

3. Does the data suggest developments in the cognitive domain?
What are they key features?

Again, the short answer is yes. However, there are ongoing challenges that appear repeatedly. These are primarily centred around a lack of interest/curiosity and the need to stay within known and safe boundaries. The lack of openness to others' ideas appears to be about the levels of trust (suggesting that the YP can only trust themselves and their own knowledge to date) with the resultant behaviour of resisting new ideas and sticking to a single focus or activity. Resistance to imaginative experimentation appears frequently along with a need for quick or instant gratification if they do embark on anything new. 'Staying with the known' is the most used summary statement in this part of the data feedback.

In the positive responses there are a range of factors that most successfully appear to generate cognitive development. Staff and peers modelling thinking, talking and behaviours matters at a foundational level. There is also evidence that finding or drawing out YP's personal interest is vital and that materials play a significant part in how these can then be taken forward. Being engrossed (in flow) looks like a personal interest brought into contact with the 'right' or best materials for this to be explored. This creates a sense of excitement and enjoyment that motivates self-direction and a sense of agency, the ability to be curious (ask questions), reflective (ask questions of themselves), and open to new ideas.

Experimentation and risk are positioned in the data as the response to being open to new ideas, and may be seen as the more nuanced or higher level (top end) of cognitive development and a clear signal of confidence, independent decision making and self-belief. This gives greatest rewards for self-achievement and pride. Critical thinking appears to be at the apex of this particular cognitive tree.

4. Does the data suggest developments in the behavioural domain?
What are the key features?

This area has crossover with 1. the social and emotional. In fact, in processing the data it was clear that several members of staff had used the two interchangeably and sometimes this also seeps into the cognitive. It is therefore unsurprising that there is some repeat here across

the two previous sections. The words that help define **Behavioural** are self- confidence, self-determination, expression, autonomy, courage, and agency.

The key things to note in the 'behavioural' are about confidence, agency, and self-management/autonomy. Throughout there is a strong sense of the YP taking responsibility and making their own decisions. To return to the issue of specificity mentioned at the outset, it also appears as though more decisions are easier to make, and more likely within a very confined/particular area of named creativity – with a specific output. There is some conversation here to be had here around a balance between achieving a goal and being able to meander and wander/wonder with materials in a non-prescribed way. Out of session activity by YP also seems to develop as a positive behaviour. Again, a signal of interest, enjoyment, and self-determination.

5. Does the data suggest a development in skills?

The skills gathered through the data are creative and technical and cover the wide range you would anticipate from different art forms. More general skills are outlined as making the abstract concrete, able to apply knowledge, creative judgement (and decision making) and understanding the tools and materials required for specific creative activities. The development of fine motor skills is mentioned along with the ability to structure both content and materials as well as time management.

Technical or artistic skills more frequently named are vocals, composition, drawing, harmonising, writing lyrics, recording and engineering (plus other use of equipment).

6. What can we learn about space, time, content and method?

Space

A difference is made between distracting and unhelpful spaces and positive spaces that encourage creativity or enable creative learning. The negative spaces are too large, noisy, not calm, have poor human dynamics, disruptive or interruptive and limit freedoms of movement. These sound and look a lot like 'usual' school environments. Positive spaces are described as the opposite and are well equipped/resourced. In fact, having many and varied materials is the most frequently reported in the data with a balance of group and 1:1 space made available. The way in which YPs work is valued in the space as well as responding to different learning needs and styles is presented alongside the ability to adapt and be flexible within the space. Ownership of any space and for it to be safe and calm is also considered to be important. External spaces visit or used also appear to give value.

Time

Structuring time with defined and dedicated time for different activity is reported as positive and supportive of creative learning. Breaks, opportunities for freedom to act and spontaneity are also included. Slow time, time for collaboration and multiple and regular sessional time is frequently mentioned as valuable, as is work that takes place over a sustained period of time. The reduction in time is also notable as something that has been changed as sessions that are too long are exhausting or not manageable for some young people who get fatigued. Additional time for those whose appetites and curiosity has grown is also raised and may be something further to consider.

Content

The two most significant features (to be more closely explored in terms of how best conditions are created) are a. content that is led/created by young people, emerging from their personal interests and b. access to a wide range of materials that enable content to be most effectively engaged with. The flexibility and expertise of the staff is best 'lightly held' so that interventions and offerings come when asked for/needed. Good scaffolding, planning and co-creation are also mentioned. What rings out for me in this is about the materials steering the content choices of young people, and that the materials enable or reduce their ability to communicate – depending on what is available. The right materials help dig deep into the emotional and behavioural aspects of this and also enables social engagement with the group – if possible. This is often achieved in an end-point or sharing, but also with equipment or facilities that invite collaboration or the bringing together of individual endeavour into a collective moment. In essence the needs/emotions/interests of the YP *are* the content. What forms around this in terms of time, materials, space and method may perhaps be viewed in a different way.

Method

There are a great many methods emerging from this part of the data. Everything you would expect to see in a creative learning environment. Multiple, flexible, YP-led, co-created, play-based, with choice, collaboration, problem-solving, etc. This is facilitated with encouragement, reassurance, positive feedback, and praise. In this exists an invisible structure, where the staff hold the space, but enable YP to move freely within this. The skill is in stepping back and letting the YP step forward.

7. Quotes of those involved

The YP tend not to leave quotes if they don't have anything positive to say. The facilitators however, detail everything and over time it is clear that the activities the students are engaged with at AEE are having a positive impact.

Most frequently recorded were that YP were enjoying sessions and gaining in confidence. It would appear that their creative capacities were beginning to open-up and there are many statements about them being able to express themselves, being more joyful, laughing, friendships, collaboration and companionship. The students are moving away from negative factors such as isolation or loneliness and are beginning to show the will to try more things and to develop new skills. There is a sense of self-value supported by the actions and attitudes of staff who are 'kind' and 'reassuring'. Most notably there are expressions of hope and aspiration, 'enthusiasm for the future' 'looking forward' and a sense of what success looks and feels like. In some cases, the work leads to a change in life choices and the prospect of possible careers.

These also stood out for me around the edges:

Honesty, clarity, care.

Care oriented with clear expectations about what is necessary for 'exchange' to work.

Being explicit, communicative, establishing context, making connections.

Values-led.

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