London Bubble
Theatre Company

# The Creating Justice programme

## Arts and theatre based programmes for children and young people in (or at risk of being in) the criminal justice system – a rapid evidence assessment

**Ellie Mendez Sayer and Sophie Reid**

21st November 2019


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Theatre Company

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## Rapid Evidence Assessment

# Introduction

In October 2019, London Bubble Theatre commissioned independent researchers Sophie Reid and Ellie Mendez Sayer to complete an evaluation of the 'Creating Justice' programme. This programme includes three projects which use theatre to work with children and young people in (or at risk of being in) the criminal justice system, including 'Way into Work', 'Creative Voices' and 'Playing Safe'. This rapid evidence assessment forms part of an initial scoping phase of the evaluation. London Bubble Theatre were keen to examine learning and evidence from existing programmes and theory to feed into their own programme of work, as well as identifying gaps that they might be able to contribute to through the evaluation.

The rapid evidence assessment explored the following:

1. Practical examples of programmes using arts and theatre with children and young people in (or at risk of being in) the criminal justice system
    i. Their desired outcomes
    ii. Any evidence of impact
    iii. Which elements of the programme worked well or not
    iv. Taking note of any measures the programmes used in evaluation

2. Theory/psychology of arts and theatre based interventions with children and young people

# Key findings

- High quality evidence of impact is widely felt to be lacking in the sector, due to factors including: capacity and resourcing of small arts organisations, difficulties in conducting evaluation in the context and mismatch between criminal justice targets and the values inherent in arts-based practice
- Arts projects appear to contribute towards reduced reoffending, albeit indirectly through helping participants develop 'protective factors' and creating the conditions for the process of desistance from crime, through which young people develop identities as non-offenders
- The combination of structure and creative freedom inherent in arts practice can be highly engaging for participants. Enjoyment of – and therefore engagement in – the activities is the first step to achieving other outcomes
- Arts projects appear to be particularly effective at re-engaging young people who have become disengaged from mainstream education as they are able to provide participants with positive experiences of learning and opportunities for achievement. Participation encourages 'a state of readiness to learn' which encourages young people to take up other education and employment opportunities
- Discussion and rehearsal of different characters' perspectives and choices they make, which shapes the narrative, allow participants to try out new roles and behaviours through repetition and rehearsal. This is not likely to lead directly to participants replicating these new behaviours in their lives, but they are better prepared to respond to other people and situations more fluidly and effectively, by taking on different roles in real life
- The creation of a safe space through group work allows young people to discuss the issues surrounding their offence, use the group as a resource for learning and develop their social skills in a supervised social environment
- The metaphorical distance associated with the use of fictional characters can allow participants to 'rehearse' solutions and free them to talk about and explore their own thoughts, feelings and emotions
- Participation in final performances or exhibitions allows participants to receive recognition and praise from their peers, building their self-esteem and providing a sense of achievement
- The success of arts projects is underpinned by their values as non-judgmental and un-authoritarian modes of engagement, unlike other institutions like school and the criminal justice system
- Sustained outcomes may be hindered by difficulties in partnership working between arts organisations, schools, youth offending teams and others. However, if partnership working can be achieved, arts projects have the potential to uncover unrecognised issues, offer signposting and improve relationships between young people and youth offending teams

# Methodology

The scope of the rapid evidence assessment was for up to 12 documents. We agreed a search strategy with the following parameters:

- Majority of literature to be UK-based, although international examples included where particularly relevant or high quality
- Literature to be post 2005, unless particularly relevant and high quality examples
- Literature to be focused on community settings where possible
- Literature to be focused on interventions with children and young people
- Case study examples to be focused on drama and theatre-based interventions, but some discussion of wider arts-based interventions included where most relevant

Initial searches were conducted using combinations of key words (see figure 1) in a variety of locations according to the type of literature:

- EBSCO Discovery Service (to identify academic literature)
- The National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance Evidence Library (to identify evaluations)
- Advanced search engine searches (to identify reports by criminal justice bodies and government)

Further literature was then identified through the 'snowball' method, using the reference lists of relevant literature identified in the initial search. The relevance of literature was assessed according to the overall scope of the literature review and by reading the abstract and introductions of the papers. The most relevant were saved to Zotero reference manager software, forming a 'longlist' of 25 pieces of literature. After the initial searches were complete, these pieces of literature were then coded according to their evidence type/regional focus/intervention setting and a brief description of their content and quality. This 'longlist' then went through a quality assurance process by a second researcher, to reach consensus on a 'shortlist' of ten pieces of literature, which were shared with London Bubble Theatre for feedback.

Following agreement of this shortlist, the literature was then read in full by the researchers and coded using NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis tool (see Figure 2). A coding framework was developed to include the following main branches (and many further sub-codes):

- Evidence quality (including description of the range of evidence, gaps, hypotheses and limitations)
- Impact (any evidence of impact across a range of areas)
- Process (reference to particular project features and discussion of mechanisms)
- Sector (description of project types and approaches in the sector)

This rapid evidence assessment is not a systematic review. The range of evidence, gaps and limitations identified in this chapter have therefore been assessed according to researcher reflections from the search and assessment by the authors of the literature included (especially where they were writing literature reviews themselves).

| PARTICIPANTS | PROJECT | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| • Youth offending | • Theatre | • Evaluation |
| • Youth offending service/YOS | • Applied theatre | • What works |
| • Youth offending team/YOT | • Drama | • Case study |
| • Youth justice | • Arts | • Literature review |
| • Young offender | • Culture/cultural | • Systematic review |
| • Criminal justice | • Creative | • Evidence review |
| • Juvenile crime | | |
| • Juvenile justice | | |
| • At risk | | |
| • Prevention | | |
| • Community order | | |

***Figure 1*** *Key words used in initial searches*

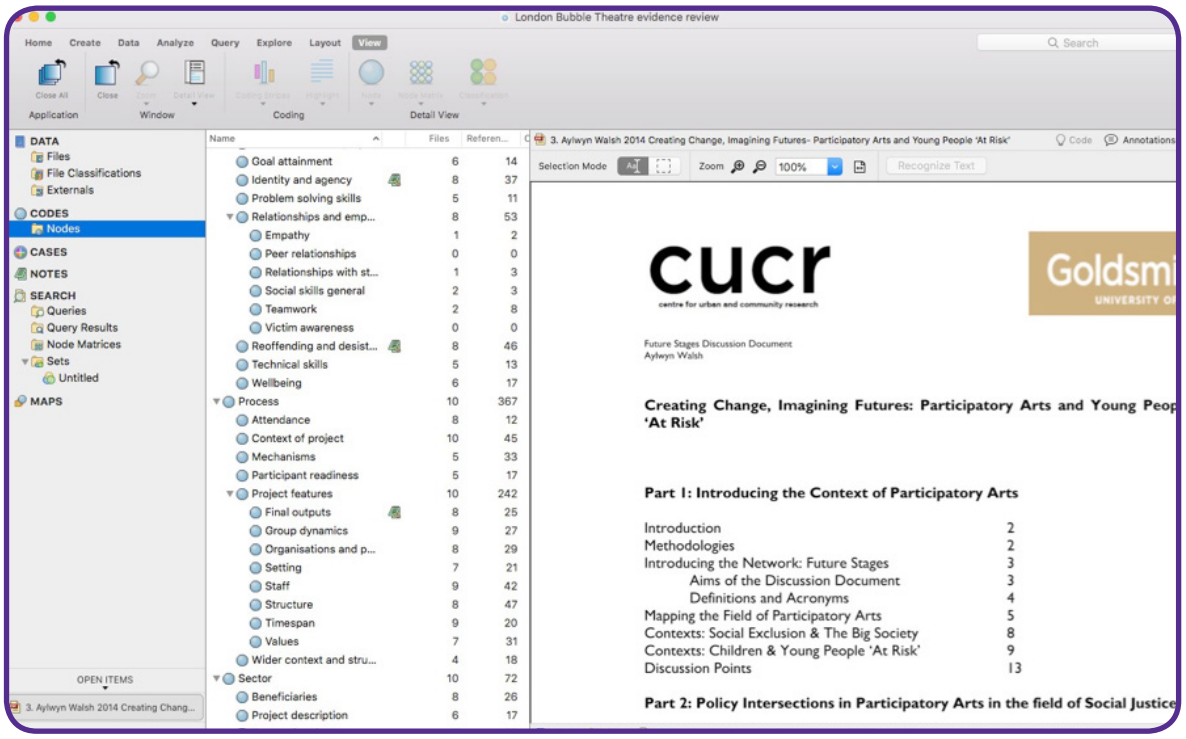



***Figure 2*** *Screenshot of coding process in NVivo 12*

## The evidence reviewed

There is considerably more literature about projects in secure settings like prisons, young offenders institutions or care homes than in the community (e.g. either those subject to Community Orders or 'at risk'). The Arts Council states that 'only in the case of young offenders, most of whom are no longer held in custody, and young people at risk of offending, is there a substantial body of research about cultural work with offenders "on the outside". Equally, there is very little research on cultural provision for ex-prisoners following their release' (Arts Council England 2018: 22). In her 2005 literature review, which remains a point of reference for the sector, Hughes examined the settings of the examples reviewed, finding that 31% (n=59) described interventions in prevention contexts, 64% (n=122) described interventions in custodial or community sentences (the vast majority were custodial), and 5% (n=9) described interventions in resettlement contexts (Hughes 2005). In the search conducted for this review, it was difficult to identify many examples from community settings. This weighting towards settings of incarceration may reflect the relatively more structured nature of such settings, which may be better suited to research. Conversely, community settings are challenging for evaluation, especially in cases where participants' attendance may fluctuate and group composition may change according to the timetable of participants' engagements with the criminal justice system.

> *Qualitative evidence in general is better able to answer the 'why'*

Overall, studies suggested that the body of evidence was not robust, relying on anecdotal and solely qualitative evidence. For example, the Centre for Applied Theatre Research stated that evaluation of the impact of drama has been 'small scale, ad hoc and mainly qualitative' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 17). Studies differed in their assessment of the quality of evidence, according to their adherence to 'standards of evidence' models in which quantitative data and experimental research models like RCTs (randomised control trials) are considered the most robust, with qualitative and case study approaches as least robust.

However, other studies stressed that case studies provide compelling evidence, and qualitative evidence in general is better able to answer the 'why' question about projects, understanding 'in which circumstances and for whom' interventions work (following the realist evaluation approach pioneered by Pawson and Tilly, 1997). Miller and Rowe support this approach, arguing that quantitative impact evaluations are normally 'conducted on program components and their relationship to the outcomes. This leaves us with a "black box"—knowing that something has happened through participation in the program, but precisely what and why that occurred has not been examined rigorously' (Miller & Rowe 2009: 53). In addition, Stinson critiques the use of psychometric tests and surveys which rely on young people's self-reports, arguing that their age and existing disadvantages (including poverty and experience of trauma) may reduce their ability to reflect on these (Stinson 2009). Indeed, in many cases, projects are designed to improve young people's cognitive abilities, including self-reflection, resulting in misleading quantitative endline measures which may seemingly show negative outcomes but actually reflect a greater ability for self-reflection in the participant.

There were a high number of studies identified which focused on music programmes. These were excluded from this review on the basis that their theoretical underpinning was sufficiently different from theory developed around drama, so that they were therefore less relevant given the small scope of the review. However, it should be noted that drama and music may often overlap in projects, such as for example, the writing and performance of rap in a drama piece. In general, studies agreed that there was little evidence which examined whether different outcomes resulted from projects using different art forms e.g. music, dance, drama, fine art.

One study attempted to model the economic impact of the arts in criminal justice. They were upfront about the challenges of using economic analysis in such settings, but stated that a lack of this sort of evidence reduced the sector's capacity to demonstrate its impact. In particular, 'arts charities have traditionally struggled to provide hard evidence of their effectiveness, particularly in achieving criminal justice system targets' (Johnson et al. 2011: 2). However, amongst the limitations of conducting economic analysis was the fact that different measures had to be used for different projects, meaning outcomes and costs could not be directly compared across projects.

This mismatch between the evidence that can be demonstrated by arts projects and the evidence required by criminal justice system targets was a perennial theme, which will be discussed further in sections on reoffending and desistance. Johnson argues that 'while government targets are built around an end—offending—arts organisations tend to focus on means—personal, social and emotional skills' (Johnson et al. 2011: 10). Hughes concludes that whilst arts programmes may not be able to influence reoffending directly, the sector must 'explain how and why the arts can have a positive effect *on the factors influencing* re-offending; to be able to distil the causal mechanisms and contexts underlying existing practice and their links to prevention and rehabilitative outcomes. To do this, it needs to develop its own body of theory' (Hughes 2005: 56, my italics). Therefore, whilst RCTs and other experimental research designs may not be appropriate in this sector, clear demonstration of the theory of how projects are understood to work is still important. In particular, studies identify gaps in the evidence about longevity of impact and 'how far they transfer to other areas of young people's lives and communities' (Hughes 2005: 35).

# The challenges of evaluating arts projects in the criminal justice setting

A number of limitations are identified in conducting evaluations in these settings, including:

- The small scale of arts organisations who may lack time, budget and specialist expertise
- Small sample sizes due to small group work
- The difficulty of gathering good-quality follow-up data on participants, including difficulties accessing statutory reoffending data or contacting participants who may lead chaotic lives
- The lack of a clear theory linking various 'intermediary outcomes' to criminal justice targets on reoffending
- The lack of counterfactual data (i.e. what would have happened without the project)
- (For economic analysis) Only being able to show quantifiable outcomes and the difficulties or inappropriateness of attributing economic values to outcomes
- Providing evidence that is credible to health and criminal justice systems from arts projects, which by their nature may be exploratory, encouraging freedom and creative expression
- The difficulty of attribution for single interventions which may work because they are part of a combination of different interventions, structured around an individual's needs
- The difficulty of 'social desirability' bias in self-reported measures, given the criminal justice context, or limited (or changing) ability for self-reflection over the project course
- The challenge of a setting in which participant involvement is not voluntary (they may be required to attend and participate according to a Court Order) and selection of participants may differ across groups (e.g. according to the 'risk principle' or those identified as most likely to benefit)
- The difficulty of measuring whether impacts are sustained over time or transfer to different areas of participants' lives
- There is a challenge of talking about 'success' measures where children and young people have already been labelled as 'at risk' and have often internalised feelings of 'failure'
- Programmes are designed to be delivered in a flexible way to meet the needs of participants or facilitators, however for evaluation this means not always comparing like with like

## Approaches in theatre-based projects

This rapid evidence assessment focuses particularly on performance and theatre-based projects, as a subset of arts programmes used in the criminal justice system. Some authors suggest that performing arts are the most common sorts of arts projects used in these settings (Johnson et al. 2011). Many of the authors try to classify projects, but Hughes' classification by thematic strands is perhaps the most useful. She identifies the following uses of arts:

- **arts to enrich and broaden the education curriculum or arts education** – most relevant in prison settings, these seek to give participants a range of educational opportunities and learn specific arts skills
- **arts as therapeutic interventions** – arts as a tool in a broader programme of therapy, including use of arts for diagnostic purposes
- **arts as adjunctive therapy** – which aim for a broad range of personal and social outcomes as well as therapeutic and often aiming to improve 'readiness' of participants for future therapeutic interventions
- **arts for participation and citizenship** – which aim for participants to play a positive role in their community, including projects based on restorative justice and peer education delivered by previous offenders
- **arts as a cultural right** – based on the idea that every social group has the right to participate in high quality arts opportunities (Hughes 2005: 10)

According to these different uses, projects differ in their duration, who runs them (e.g. clinicians, artists, clinical justice staff), or their focus on a final product or the process. Project beneficiaries included primary school children; young people not in education, employment or training; children and young people who had been expelled from school; young offenders in care settings; those on Detention & Training Orders, reparation orders or subject to the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme.

Particular approaches discussed in more detail across the studies include participatory theatre, cognitive behavioural approaches and Forum Theatre.

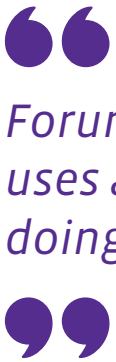
> *Group work programmes based on cognitive behavioural approaches are seen as the most evidence-based*

Walsh discusses 'participatory theatre' as an umbrella term for a range of drama-based practices including Applied Theatre or Drama, Community Theatre and Workshop Theatre (Walsh 2014: 6). However, the term 'participatory theatre' tends to imply projects with common values – 'to give voice to marginalised groups, challenge power structures and advocate for change' (Walsh 2014: 24). Many projects with young people in the criminal justice system are therefore unlikely to be considered 'participatory theatre' according to this definition, as they are more instrumental in their nature and focused on therapeutic outcomes and participants changing their behaviour. However, there are examples of participatory theatre in the criminal justice field, for example where structural disadvantages and stigma towards offenders are addressed.

Group work programmes based on cognitive behavioural approaches are common and seen as the most evidence-based. These draw on cognitive behavioural therapy and include 'giving positive reinforcement and challenging negative behaviour (where appropriate), modelling positive social relationships through the group environment (providing opportunities to observe others) and identifying and confronting attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour that support offending behaviour' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 15). They are particularly focused on increasing

participants' ability to keep things in perspective, to solve problems and think less rigidly. Some programmes are designed by clinical psychologists and follow these 'treatment' methods closely (e.g. the Plus programme) whereas others draw more on applied theatre and are designed to be accessible to be used by criminal justice staff (e.g. Blagg) (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 48). Adaptations for use with children and young people include a focus on drama games, use of masks, and improvisations around risk scenarios.

Froggett evaluates an Odd Arts programme which is influenced by Forum Theatre. Forum Theatre uses a 'learning by doing' approach, which 'moves from exercises that elicit issues and problems in the participants' lives, to dramatisation of those issues and finally a theatrical performance that can be questioned or altered by the audience in a process of participative problem solving' (Froggett et al. 2017: 11).



*Forum Theatre uses a 'learning by doing' approach*

# Impact

## Relationships and empathy

A large number of studies demonstrate that arts have an effect on people's ability to cooperate with others and work in a team. Walsh argues that drama in particular requires a high level of awareness of other people and encourages 'understandings of mutuality, empathy, and interdependence', for example the reciprocity required for successful improvisation exercises (Walsh 2014: 25).

In addition, many studies showed positive impacts on participant levels of empathy, particularly around victim awareness (a key focus of many projects). This was a key impact in the Blagg project which developed a narrative around the fictional character 'Joe Blagg'. The authors found that 'playing different parts in the developing narrative helps them gain the ability to view the offence from a variety of perspectives', including that of the victim (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 28). However, this impact appeared to be gendered, with authors noting that female participants were better able to engage with the perspective of the victim, whilst many male participants minimised or refused to play the part of the victim.

Finally, some studies reported improvements in participants' relationships with staff and other adults (e.g. family) as a result of improved communication skills. In some projects, interaction between participants and youth offending team staff in an informal setting was felt to improve their relationship (Hughes 2005). Improved relationships have been shown to be a protective factor against committing crime, suggesting that these intermediate outcomes could be linked in theory to desistance from crime.

## Routes to education and employment

One of the most convincing areas of impact shown across a number of studies is that participation in arts programmes is particularly effective at re-engaging young people who have become disengaged from mainstream education. Their participation may encourage 'a state of readiness to learn', thereby increasing uptake of further opportunities for education, employment or behaviour programmes (Walsh 2014: 17). A literature review by the Arts Council found that 'participation in formal education and work-related activities increases' as a result of 'arts projects facilitating high levels of engagement' (Arts Council England 2018: 17). This was linked to identity development, with some authors arguing that arts projects helped participants to develop 'a strong identity as a learner' and could be a first step towards re-engaging participants in more formal learning (Arts Council England 2018: 18). Hughes' literature review identified some evidence of 'extrinsic transfer effects' from positive learning experiences in the arts to other areas of the curriculum; however this evidence was anecdotal and not generally supported by evidence of academic attainment (Hughes 2005: 28).

There was some evidence of arts programmes also delivering improvements in literacy and numeracy, through this same mechanism of arts engaging people in learning activities (Nottingham Trent University & Ecotec Research and Consulting 2005). However this evidence was more disputed, due to sample selection and a lack of counterfactual analysis. In general, there was more evidence of impact on attitudes to learning, than on educational attainment.

Some projects allowed participants to work towards a specific qualification, for example Odd Arts' Forum Theatre involved participants working towards a peer mentoring award, which may improve their employability (Froggett et al. 2017).

## Reoffending and desistance

Across the studies, reoffending was not a direct impact from arts projects. Instead, arts projects were seen to contribute to intermediary outcomes which acted as protective factors and were associated with reduced reoffending. For example, individual impacts at a psychological level (such as experiences of goal attainment or development of an identity as a learner) may lead to tangible impacts in terms of educational or employment uptake. These in turn lead to wider societal impacts like reduced reoffending.

In addition, the literature discussed a move in the sector away from focusing on an often linear understanding of reoffending, towards a more complex process of 'desistance'. This understanding of offending incorporates the complex interplay between behaviours, thoughts and identity, with the belief that in order to stop an offender offending, they must develop an identity as a 'non- offender'. This is based on the logic that change to self-identity can precede behaviour change. As the Arts Council summarises, this approach means 'outputs of a particular activity or intervention, such as an arts project, can be assessed in terms of their contribution to this wider systematic change of turning offenders into non-offenders' (Arts Council England 2018: 12). The Arts Council conclude that whilst there is 'general agreement that arts interventions cannot be expected to provide the 'event' of desistance' they can 'help to create the conditions for the process' (Arts Council England 2018: 18).

As well as factors like improved problem solving abilities (which may help participants to find ways to avoid crime in the future), one area of impact for which there was much evidence across the studies was in self-identity development, as a crucial step in the desistance process. This identity development impact is discussed in more detail in the following section.

## Identity and agency

Some studies differentiated between primary and secondary desistance, where secondary desistance includes the development of a non-offender identity alongside a period of not committing crime (Kelly et al. 2017). This represents 'change on a more profound and permanent level, in which an offender ultimately achieves a new identity – a selfhood free from crime' (Arts Council England 2018: 12).

Linked to this is the idea of agency or self-efficacy (sometimes expressed in terms of 'locus of control'), the extent to which individuals feel they are able to determine the outcomes of events in their lives, rather than these being determined by external forces outside their control. The Arts Council identifies the development of a sense of agency as a crucial step in the process of desistance, with a 'more secure sense of self, and of the potential for change' leading to better self-control and problem solving abilities (Arts Council England 2018: 14).

A number of the studies found evidence that 'arts projects may help to engage offenders with the idea of change, provide offenders with a way of expressing themselves, provide a positive experience while in custody, and help offenders to imagine an alternative future for themselves' (Arts Council England 2018: 18). The mechanisms by which this occurred included: utilising the metaphors of journeys and pathways in dramatic narratives, or the concept of roles to understand the factors which influence our identities (Walsh 2014: 12, 22); breaking activities down into short-term achievable goals which was empowering for participants; and emphasising interdependence and mutuality in drama exercises that taught participants that all actions have effects (Walsh 2014: 25). Repetition and rehearsal of scenarios which include different responses 'will increase a young person's ability to be fluent in a wide variety of solutions and responses to social moments', helping participants to understand and feel more in control of their own responses (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 13).

However, given the complexity of factors affecting offending behaviour and the requirements from within the criminal justice system, studies tended to agree that the role that arts projects could most effectively play was to 'help foster and reinforce motivation for and commitment to' the processes of change (McNeill et al, 2011 quoted in Walsh 2014: 18).

## Confidence and goal attainment

Many studies showed that arts projects increased the confidence of participants in their own abilities. In addition, they provided participants with 'accessible ways to achieve concrete goals, often for the very first time' (Johnson et al. 2011: 9). In the Odd Arts Forum Theatre project, the final performance watched by an audience was an important part of producing a sense of achievement and pride as an outcome from the programme. The performance 'conveyed a strong message to the young people that, despite poor qualifications, they could build on their own experience to achieve something of value. Inadvertently but importantly, it also showed that it was possible to pull out something tangible out of the somewhat disorganised situation of the group, conveying a hopeful determination to 'keep going'' (Froggett et al. 2017: 20). In general, learning new skills in the arts was shown across a number of studies to give participants a sense of pride in their achievements, often among those who would not engage in a typical classroom setting (Hughes 2005: 33).

> *Learning new skills in the arts gave participants a sense of pride*

Additionally, some studies showed impacts on participants' confidence within peer relationships, whereby they felt more confident and able to be assertive, in order to resist peer pressure which might lead them to commit offences in the future. The mechanisms by which this could be achieved included role play which allowed participants to practice and develop assertiveness in a safe environment, as well as specific exercises, or characters, focused on understanding the role of peers in offending (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003; Hughes 2005).

## Discipline and responsibility

A number of studies found examples from prison settings where arts programmes create more rule-abiding inmates, with reductions in the number of infractions. This was linked to wellbeing, whereby prisoners' involvement in the arts helped to enrich their environment, relieve boredom and offer opportunities to express anger and emotion in a permitted space (Hughes 2005; Walsh 2014). There were similar findings for young people in terms of 'compliance with criminal justice orders and regimes' (Walsh 2014: 19). Arts practice was suggested to provide a balance between structure and freedom, which allows participants to develop self-discipline in a less moralistic environment: 'there is a discipline, focus and centre to be identified in arts practices that "feels different" to the rules and regulations of a classroom' (Walsh 2014: 6).

At an individual level, studies showed mixed impacts on participants' ability to take responsibility for their own actions. Some studies suggested impacts were achieved through drama exercises which rely on cooperation, as well as the structure of projects in which participants were encouraged to intervene in the narrative with suggestions for how the character 'should' act. The logic followed that problem-solving on behalf of fictional characters could allow participants to become self-critics of their own behaviour (Froggett et al. 2017: 18). However, this was not the case for all projects, with staff on Blagg reporting little change in 'willingness to accept responsibility for behaviour and willingness to acknowledge the need for change', especially where this was particularly high or low at the beginning of the project (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 20).

## Wellbeing and enjoyment

A number of studies highlighted the importance of arts interventions being enjoyable for participants and the tension of this within a criminal justice system which is also punitive. These studies argued that enjoyment is a prerequisite for other positive impacts to be achieved. For example, some studies suggested that enjoyment was necessary in order to achieve engagement in activities. As discussed above, this engagement is an important part of participants being able to benefit from the activities along the lines of developing self-confidence, agency or achieving goals.

Impact on wellbeing was reported in terms of feelings of calmness, relaxation and enjoyment from participation in arts (Nottingham Trent University & Ecotec Research and Consulting 2005). At an environmental scale, these activities were suggested to make prison or involvement in criminal justice system settings more tolerable, providing an 'escape' from daily realities. Walsh argues that the strength of arts practice 'is their ability to demarcate a creative, collaborative time and space in which individual participants can become absorbed, and be "transported" from their everyday realities, which are otherwise characterised by a sense of difficulty and 'chaos'' (Walsh 2014: 25). Stinson also argues that arts projects can foster a sense of community and culture, which has impacts on the wellbeing of members of the group through positive relationships and a sense of belonging (Stinson 2009: 12). This may help to counter some of the social and psychological disadvantages of those who are socially excluded (Hughes 2005: 33).

## Ways into the arts

A few studies reported impacts on participants in terms of gaining technical and artistic skills which they could make use of to gain employment opportunities in the arts, although other studies cautioned against raising expectations of participants in this regard. One study found that prisoners often found their artistic opportunities to be limited by resources rather than tailored to their interests, and struggled to continue with artistic pursuits on their release. Other projects that used artists/actors as facilitators or mentors were shown to be good ways of introducing participants to the arts and acting as good role models.

Given widespread evidence of the positive impact of participation in arts activities on wellbeing in general, introducing participants to the arts could increase their wellbeing in the long term through continued arts participation.

# Project context, design and culture

In addition to exploring evidence of impact in the literature, this rapid evidence assessment also focused on understanding how elements of project design and culture had an effect on project success. This 'process' side of the evaluation is an important way of understanding why a project works (or doesn't work), especially by identifying the underlying mechanisms. This section therefore finishes with a summary of the key mechanisms identified across the literature.

## Context

In general, a number of important contextual factors were identified in the studies which were thought to influence outcomes for participants. Most important were the wider structures of exclusion facing many participants. These included intersecting issues of poverty, disenfranchisement, social isolation, and prejudice based on ethnicity, sexuality or disability. Young people may have experienced trauma, resulting in a range of physiological and psychological effects. As a result, many young people had fragmented education or little experience of mainstream education. Their previous participation in the arts (especially in a structured setting) may have been consequently limited. They may also have lower literacy and numeracy levels than average, although in general, this was not a barrier for arts projects.

The criminal justice setting meant that participation was often not voluntary, leading to resistance from participants. In order to create a sense of separation from the normal criminal justice system, much of the arts work in the sector starts from a 'blank slate' approach where offences are not disclosed. However, some studies found that this could hinder successful group work in certain contexts where taboos surrounded particular crimes. For example, a project in the context of a care home for young people who had been engaged in sexually inappropriate behaviour, led to a sense of 'an elephant in the room' in their final performance (which avoided discussion of sexual offences) and was felt to reinforce taboos and stigma surrounding sexual offences (Froggett et al. 2017: 27).

The structure of the criminal justice system also meant that criminal justice staff working with young people did not always have a lot of information about them and even when they did, that this was not always passed on to arts facilitators. In particular, some participants were discovered to have special educational needs or undiagnosed communication difficulties, causing disparities in ability within groups and requiring considerable unplanned adaptation to the facilitation of exercises (Froggett et al. 2017: 23).

## Participant readiness

Although arts projects were generally felt to have low barriers to entry, a number of studies discussed the appropriateness of arts projects in particular settings and the factors that influenced participant 'readiness', including 'age, gender, size of group, readiness for group work, issue/crime to be addressed, types of orders, education experience, experience of groups, behaviour, lifestyle, circumstances, motivation' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 16).

Studies showed that most projects adhered to the 'risk principle' with more 'intensive programmes aimed at high risk offenders and vice versa' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 16). However, some studies suggested that participants' lack of motivation and expectations of the projects could negatively affect their outcomes, with many participants unsure about what to expect from the group or 'reluctant to clearly identify their offending as a problem they wanted to address in the group' (Centre for Applied

> *The best interventions were those where the practitioner acted as a 'facilitator'*

Theatre Research 2003: 19). Some participants may have negative experiences of groups from the context of their offence and may need to be prepared for group work.

One study which evaluated a 'Terriers' performance, a play centred around gang crime which was performed in secondary schools as part of a preventative strategy, discussed participant readiness in terms of the optimum age of the audience. Whilst some teachers felt the content was too distressing or went 'over the heads' of young viewers, others felt that in order to fulfil a truly preventative role, younger primary school audiences should be targeted (Kelly et al. 2017). In addition, whether or not to target 'at-risk' school children for additional activities around the performance was discussed, with some arguing that these children might more directly benefit from follow-on activities, whereas others felt these young people 'might find the play disturbing because of direct relevance to their lives' (Kelly et al. 2017: 58). In addition, singling out 'at-risk' children at such a young age could contribute to unhelpful labelling, affecting their personal identity development as vulnerable or disadvantaged (Kelly et al. 2017: 69).

## Practitioners

Projects across the studies varied as to whether they were led by professional artists/performers, therapists, trained facilitators, criminal justice staff or youth workers. In some cases, the presence of trained artists or performers was felt to be an important part of the success of the project due to them not being individuals associated with discipline and punishment in the education or criminal justice system and representing aspirational role models outside of this context, thereby creating a 'destigamtising effect' (Arts Council England 2018: 20). This 'master artist' model was most prevalent in US contexts (Hughes 2005: 51). However, in other studies, the opportunity to see criminal justice staff in different roles and in more informal settings was shown to have a positive effect on relationships between staff and young people (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 31).

The Arts Council concluded that regardless of professional role, the best interventions were those where the practitioner acted as a 'facilitator' rather than teacher or authoritarian (Arts Council England 2018: 20). Facilitation skills are crucial and far from easy to develop, so that many studies recommended practitioners should have access to more training, especially where projects were being rolled-out so that they could be delivered by youth offending teams themselves or where they relied on volunteers within community development contexts (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 17; Walsh 2014: 8). Hughes concluded that the best practitioners are those who 'combine high quality arts skills with the ability to relate to, inspire and teach young people', especially vulnerable young people (Hughes 2005: 54).

## Values

Certain values underpinning projects were identified as being particularly effective in leading to positive outcomes for participants. These included:

- Strength-based rather than deficit models, focused on the expertise that young people have and providing 'opportunities for participants to be experts – thereby challenging the paradigm of adults always appearing to be 'right'" (Stinson 2009: 23; Walsh 2014: 24)
- The fostering of a supportive group environment allowing for 'taking risks, being vulnerable in front of others' (Arts Council England 2018: 20)

- Approaches built on pursuit of hopeful futures for young people which 'challenges the very idea that children and young people who are deemed to be "at risk" have an inevitable, tragic outcome' (Walsh 2014: 31)
- Cognitive behavioural approaches which do not assume that an individual is 'bad' but that they are 'a product of an environment that has failed to equip them with the necessary cognitive skills to lead law abiding lives.' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 14)
- Approaches built on 'trust and respect rather than prescriptive discipline', which tend towards enjoyment and away from punishment (Froggett et al. 2017: 12)
- The unique role of the arts in offering 'a non-judgmental and un-authoritarian model of engagement, as well as a non-traditional, non-institutional social and emotional environment' (Hughes 2005: 70)

## Organisations and partners involved

Many projects required close partnerships between arts organisations and Youth Offending Teams, schools, pupil referral units or the police. The strength of these partnerships had a strong effect on the outcomes of the project.

The information provided by YOTs, schools or police about participants to arts organisations affected their ability to plan. Some authors identified that a lack of information meant it was harder for projects to adequately plan for participants with special educational needs or communication difficulties (Froggett et al. 2017). For those on Detention and Training Orders who served part of their sentence in custody and part in community, there was a lack of communication resulting in participants being unable to continue with arts-based activities they had started whilst in custody (Nottingham Trent University & Ecotec Research and Consulting 2005). In Blagg, the authors found that for effective delivery, 'staff delivering the programme need prior access to information about young people, including their offence, relevant personal and social issues and young people's experience of/responses in group settings and relationships with peers' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 43)

Some arts activities would benefit from partnership working with schools or youth offending teams to undertake follow-up activities. For example in the 'Terriers' school performance, the authors identified that teachers were better placed than the actors to undertake follow-up discussions about the themes in the play during PSHE classes or similar. However, teachers were often unaware of teaching resources to help them have these discussions, or found it difficult to deliver within the structure of PSHE lessons (Kelly et al. 2017).

Partnerships worked well where arts-based group work could feed directly into YOTs' additional work with young people. For example, in the Blagg project 'staff running the programme were able to report back to personal officers and make recommendations for future work [including] further offending behaviour work, referral to drugs agency, work on self-esteem, referral to bullying programmes' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 21). This signposting role was highlighted across a number of studies, particularly where it was felt that arts projects 'often highlighted previously obscured problems relating to offending behaviour that could be addressed through ongoing work' (Hughes 2005: 31). The authors evaluating Blagg even recommended that it could be used as an 'informal assessment tool that can be planned into young people's orders early on' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 49). However, they also recognised possible ethical issues involved in assuming young people's comments in theatre sessions reflected their real lives, as these do not constitute formal disclosures.

Some partnerships were challenging where organisational priorities conflicted. In Odd Arts Forum Theatre project, one setting was a training organisation. The structured setting

meant there was a greater focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes, as well as completing written logs connected to gaining a qualification. These clashed with Odd Arts priorities to build social skills in a creative and open environment and affected the participants' enjoyment of the sessions who tended towards dis-engagement and resistance instead (Froggett et al. 2017)

Charities like Unitas, who delivered a large-scale Summer Arts College project, were able to play a coordinating role, including helping individual YOTs to plan and deliver the scheme, supported by training resources and quality assurance, which challenges the idea that arts organisations are always in the delivery role (Johnson et al. 2011)

Miller and Rowe also identified some projects where personal officers/caseworkers took part in the activities alongside young people, strengthening their relationships (Miller & Rowe 2009: 58)

## Group dynamics

The creation of a safe space within group work was a crucial factor for the success of projects. This safe space could be 'constructed as a set of mutually defined (and revised) behaviours that include respect, the negotiation of ground rules, etc' (Walsh 2014: 24). The creation of a safe space allowed participants to engage with the themes of their offence and make progress such that 'an issue is transformed from a hard fact of an individual's life into a resonating fiction that all can share, then it is released for public discussion' (Froggett et al. 2017: 38).

Projects using Forum Theatre in particular utilised the role of the group or an audience in 'intervening' in dramatic situations to problem solve. In this situation, the group operate as a mutual learning resource by intervening 'into someone else's story to offer transformative potential solutions. In the process, they rehearse change for themselves and others' (Walsh 2014: 26). This can include fictional characters who become almost like members of the group who are 'representative of the lives and experiences of group members without being identified with any individual' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 12).

Just having an opportunity to be with others in a group could be an important factor in itself for participants who were socially excluded (not in mainstream education, for example). Some studies found that groups provided participants with an opportunity to form new social relationships, act as peer support for each other and gain 'recognition and praise from others and subsequent positive impact on self-esteem and self-image' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 14).

Some studies identified difficulties in group environments, including where participants had previously negative experiences of group situations or the 'contagiousness' of attitudes which could disrupt groups[1]. This was particularly acute in situations where gang dynamics were a factor, such as in the Blagg project in Manchester. The authors identified that activities focused on victim awareness could be difficult 'in the context of a group of unfamiliar peers with whom it is important to establish and maintain some sort of image or status' (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 28). In the case of a larger performance, such as 'Terriers' in Liverpool, the authors suggested that the subsequent discussion of the themes was hampered by being delivered in a large group, where many children would not feel confident to ask questions or speak in front of the whole audience (Kelly et al. 2017).

[1] As exemplified by one facilitators' reflections on working with male groups: 'Dance and drama are not seen as 'macho' and it only takes one person to say something negative for them to give up…they find it hard to be supportive of each other' (Nottingham Trent University & Ecotec Research and Consulting 2005: 37).

## Final outputs

Across the studies there was some discussion of product vs process, in terms of the focus of the project. Many projects stressed the focus on the process, where participation, engagement, teamwork and the experience of being part of the project were felt to contribute to the outcomes for individuals (Walsh 2014: 29). In particular, projects leaning more towards therapeutic interventions tended to stress the personal processes involved for participants rather than a final product.

However, there was also evidence supporting the importance of the final product, especially in contexts where it can be shown to the young person's friends and family (or wider community) in a performance/exhibition setting. This was particularly important in the context of reintegration back into society, along the principles of restorative justice, offering an opportunity for 'a public success experience' through which the participants could project a new identity and have this reflected back (Miller & Rowe 2009: 60). The idea that participants can perform their journey as a narrative, or 'redemption script', could help them make sense of their offence and contribute towards the process of desistance (Arts Council England 2018: 21).

In addition, a final product may give the young person a sense of achievement and of having attained a goal, which is a motivating factor for continued learning or engagement in other beneficial activities. Some projects helped young people to work towards a qualification for this reason, with authors reporting the great sense of achievement that this produced in participants.

## Time and location

Projects varied enormously according to their timespan and session length, even sometimes being delivered in different formats for the same project[2]. Timings tended to reflect the flexibility required to operate in criminal justice contexts and most projects were relatively short term (up to 6 weeks), which was felt by some authors to be a limitation for sustained outcomes for participants (Walsh 2014: 19–20). Some studies found that long sessions were difficult for participants who were not in mainstream education and were not used to doing full days, including Odd Arts where they adapted the sessions around a 40 minute window where participants were able to maintain concentration (Froggett et al. 2017: 22).

A number of studies also stressed the importance of project settings being different from the norm for participants, as a factor influencing their success. Walsh argued that 'it is often useful for arts activities to be conducted in neutral spaces or spaces that can be made to feel utterly different from 'normal'' in order to facilitate the creation of a space that feels like a safe haven or escape from everyday realities (Walsh 2014: 25). Settings outside of education or the criminal justice system were also felt to be more conducive for discussion of taboo and sensitive subjects (Froggett et al. 2017: 9). Some authors argued that arts activities should go to 'where young people are' (Hughes 2005: 54). However, this could also conflict with the need for adequate space and facilities, for example for staging a play in non-professional theatre spaces like schools (Kelly et al. 2017: 11). Finally, some studies found that access issues could affect attendance, with the availability of transport a factor which had to be addressed for the success of the project (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 5; Hughes 2005: 55).

[2] For example, Blagg was delivered as a two-day-long programme and also as six evening sessions (Centre for Applied Theatre Research 2003: 4–5).

# Conclusions and key mechanisms

- The combination of structure and creative freedom inherent in arts practice can be highly engaging for participants. Enjoyment of – and therefore engagement in – the activities is the first step to achieving other outcomes
- Discussion and rehearsal of different characters' perspectives, and the choices they make, which shape the narrative, allow participants to try out new roles and behaviours through repetition and rehearsal. This is not likely to lead directly to participants replicating these new behaviours in their lives, but they are better prepared to respond to other people and situations more fluidly and effectively, taking on different roles in real life
- The combination of visual, tactile and embodied artforms alongside the creation of a safe group space can allow participants to express emotions, narratives and ideas that they might otherwise find difficult to articulate
- Drama relies on mutuality, empathy, and interdependence (even in basic drama 'warm-up' games) which provide a contrast to participants' lives in which they may experience feelings of hopelessness, chaos and lack of direction
- The metaphorical distance associated with the use of fictional characters can allow participants to 'rehearse' solutions and free them to talk about and explore their own thoughts, feelings and emotions
- Performing in front of friends and family helps participants to redefine themselves as an 'artist' or 'performer', confirming that they can change their identity
- Through presentation to an audience of peers in a safe setting, issues considered private or shameful can be available for collective discussion and solutions rehearsed
- Participation in final performances or exhibitions allow participants to receive recognition and praise from their peers, building their self-esteem and providing a sense of achievement
- Arts and dramatic settings provide 'liminal' spaces in which young people can become other than they are, and become more aware of the roles they can play
- Arts and drama may provide intense and memorable social and emotional learning experiences for participants with experience of trauma (where trauma has been shown to have a destructive effect on memory, affecting young peoples' ability to learn)
- The use of masks can be a useful metaphor to interrogate ideas of destructive patterns of behaviour and 'fronts', in contrast to an 'inner voice'

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# Annex 1 – Measures identified

A number of quantitative measures were identified across the studies, including:

- Questionnaires covering areas like resilience, agency/self-efficacy, hope, wellbeing, motivation to change, impulsivity/problem-solving, interpersonal trust, practical problems
- Specific measures for wellbeing including GHQ12 and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale
- Specific measures for educational attainment including the Aspiration Index, Perceived Competence Scale, California Achievement Test
- Specific measures for youth personal development including the Social Skills Rating System- Elementary Level, Youth Coping Inventory (US context)
- Specific measures about attitudes to offending including Normative Beliefs about Aggression measure (US context) or CRIME-PICS
- Intermediate Outcomes Toolkit developed for government, recently published
- Economic analysis using economic values for outcomes and costs (very rare)
- Data on convictions from the Youth Offending Information System (YOIS), including data from ASSET forms and court proceedings

However, many studies identified limitations of using these measures, due to low levels of literacy amongst participants, 'social desirability' bias in self-reported measures, or limited (or changing) ability for self-reflection over the project course.


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