Serpentine Offsite Education Programme 2016—18

Dr Anton Franks & Professor Pat Thomson with Louisa Penfold

Centre for Research in Arts, Creativity and Literacies
https://cracl.net/

School of Education, University of Nottingham

Final Research and Evaluation Report Volume 1

Executive Summary
The authors would like to express sincere thanks to the Serpentine Galleries, particularly Education Curator, Alex Thorp, Assistant Education Curators, Ben Messih and Jemma Egan; to the children, parents and staff of the Portman Early Childhood Centre, and in particular Jo White, the Head of the centre; to commissioned artists Albert Potrony, Adelita Husni-Bey, Bahbak Hashemi-Nezhad, Adam J B Walker and Emma McGarry and Jasleen Kaur on Changing Play projects; artists Adam James and James Harper, staff and students from Gateway Academy on the Moving Up project; artists Barby Asante and Teresa Cisneros and students and staff from Westminster Academy on the Youth Forum project.

Introduction

Contexts

1. Geographical location
2. Socially engaged art practice and gallery education
3. Education and public care policy

Summary of Findings

Summary of Recommendations

The Serpentine Education Programme

The Programme Philosophy

Approaches to Research and Evaluation

Significant features of the Serpentine Education Programme

Project Case Studies

Albert Potrony, ‘Play as Radical Practice’, May 2016–July 2018
Bahbak Hashemi-Nezhad, ‘On What Grounds’ February 2017–October 2018

Emma McGarry & Adam J B Walker, ‘Special Rights’, May 2017–November 2018
Adelita Husni-Bey, October 2017–present
Jasleen Kaur, January 2018–present
Adam James ‘Here is the Place’, Moving Up, May 2016–June 2018
Barby Asante & Teresa Cisneros, Youth Forum, October 2016–April 2017

Sustainability and future steps

Changing Play

Moving Up

Youth Forum

Appendix 1: Serpentine Education Project Questions
Appendix 2: Mapping the Serpentine Education Programme with Arts Council England Quality Principles

References
The final report on research and evaluation carried out with Serpentine Education reports on a wide-ranging and ongoing community-based, participatory arts project focusing on children and young people at key moments of transition, developed by the Serpentine’s Education team. Research into and evaluation of the programme took place between March 2016 and December 2018. This report has been drafted by members of the Centre for Research in the Arts, Creativity and Literacies (CRACL) at the School of Education, University of Nottingham in consultation with the Serpentine’s education team.

As the Serpentine’s education team view collaborative arts projects ‘as a form of research and knowledge production’, the research and evaluation presented is intended as complementary to the ongoing work of the education curators and the artists they commission. Reporting on seven distinct wide-ranging collaborative projects, commissioned and contributed to by the Serpentine’s education curators, is necessarily synoptic, intended to give a sense of the richness of these projects, how they involved diverse participants and experiences and led towards a variety of effects and outcomes. It cannot claim to comprehensively capture the scope and richness of the projects that make up the entire programme.

Anton Franks was the primary field researcher, sampling, visiting, observing and participating in selected sessions. He felt privileged, learning a lot from working and talking with Alex Thorp, her team, the artists, children and young people, and has enjoyed the experience immensely. Louisa Penfold observed two of the projects.

The report is in two volumes. The first deals primarily with results and recommendations. The second volume presents extended descriptions of each project and artistic practices.

There are a few in-text references to literature in this volume for which full bibliographic details are given at the end of Volume 2 of the report in which extended case studies are presented.
The Serpentine Offsite Education Programme with children and young people operates within three key contexts:

**Geographical location**

The Programme is run in collaboration with schools and an Early Childhood Centre in and around the Edgware Road area in central London, with a particular focus on the Church Street neighbourhood situated between the Edgware Road and Lisson Grove.

The people of the Church Street area are culturally and linguistically diverse, with a large number of families whose first language is Arabic, deriving from North Africa and the Middle East, among others from areas such as east Africa, east Asia, Latin America. Children attending schools and the Early Childhood Centre in the main live on high-density housing estates, around which there are few open, green spaces. Despite its location in the wealthy City of Westminster, the children’s families are mostly on low incomes and are often subject to relocation by the local authority to outlying areas of London. However, although the demographic profile conforms to one of ‘deprivation’—one that might be seen to be in stark contrast to the profile of visitors to the Serpentine Galleries situated in the verdant surroundings of Kensington Gardens—it is, nevertheless, an area rich in culture.

**Socially engaged art practice and gallery education**

The programmes reported here bring together the artist-based traditions of gallery education and the community-oriented practices of social engagement. They aim in particular to support public institutions catering for the communities marginalised by local and national government policy agendas. They also aim to support educational practices that are open, imaginative and creative, as opposed to those which are easily tested and made into comparable data sets.

The British tradition of gallery education sits in stark contrast to that in other parts of the world where docent-conducted tours and exhibition-oriented and relatively prescribed activities are on offer. The British tradition focuses much more on providing opportunities for children and young people to engage more directly with artists and with contemporary art ways of seeing, thinking, ‘not knowing’, challenging and playing. Many galleries also offer education ‘outreach’ programmes and gallery-based audience development programmes which aim to give access to quality artworks and events.

Socially engaged art practices, on the other hand, work in community settings to support local people to explore their everyday realities and express their opinions. This kind of work is often located in areas such as north Westminster where artists wrestle with the dilemmas of gentrification and ‘artwashing’. However, much socially engaged practice aims to ‘speak truth to power’. Such work often ignores children and young people.

**Education and public care policy**

In recent years, the ‘schoolification’ of early childhood education has been prevalent, resulting in a loss of confidence in child- and play-centred approaches to early childhood educational practice. In a review of policy on early childhood education for the past 20 years, educationalist Peter Moss has noted the effects of ‘an emphasis on markets and individual choice, combined with the development of strong central control’ on early childhood education that has skewed its organisation and purposes (Moss, 2014, 356). Instead, early childhood education has neither become more ‘integrated and coherent’ nor provided more ‘democratic and multipurpose’ centres of early childhood education (ibid, 357). The Serpentine’s focus on supporting play-based education in an early childhood setting, serving disadvantaged communities, speaks back to this policy agenda.

The emphasis on markets and choice in the context of a more centralised educational policy, together with its emphasis on what can be seen as a more traditional academic-centred curriculum secondary education, has also had impact on primary and secondary schooling. In primary schools, the implementation of high stakes standardised tests (SATs) has had a tendency to put a squeeze on more creative approaches and arts subjects, particularly in the final Year 6 curriculum. They have also been shown to have a deleterious effect on children’s mental health and well-being, with particular impact on those children labelled as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Most secondary schools are now tightly regimented, responding to local markets and harsh accountability regimes. Local democratic control of schooling is reduced, with two-thirds of secondary schools and one-third of primary schools now academies. The imposition of the school audit measure of the English Baccalaureate, combined with Russell Group university advice about the inadvisability of taking arts subjects at senior secondary level, has led to dramatic drops in arts subjects offered, arts teacher numbers and student uptake in.

These contexts mean that the institutions with which the Serpentine work are under severe pressure, as are the communities who are threatened by the continuing gentrification of their neighbourhoods. Arguably, there is a greater need for social justice-oriented programmes such as the Serpentine Galleries’ education programme now than in any other recent period.
8 Summary of Findings

The Serpentine’s community-based Education Programme facilitated learning in, through, and about the arts, producing significant learning outcomes for children and young people. This was achieved through enhanced creative experiences, by working in and through the arts alongside commissioned artists and education curators. Specifically, the programme produced:

(1) Key learning benefits complementary to and beyond the formal curriculum:
—Developed all children and young people's social and emotional capacities through collaboration with peers and adults. They exercised imagination and voice through narrative, argument, making, and interacting.

—Developed and extended the learning and development of young children through play. Children used a range of communication practices. Children learnt new language and enhanced their literacy and oracy skills. Their ability to communicate multimodally and through many and various media was supported and extended. They built their capacity and abilities to develop narratives and stories. Developed their mathematical and scientific concepts. Children explored numbers, shapes, size, scale, weight, balance, pattern, volume, refraction, gravity, movement, and friction.

—In the Youth Forum project young people are engaged in exploring social issues, institutional practices and everyday social contexts. In Youth Forum and Moving Up projects, young people’s sense of self and agency, and their capacity to act in and on the world, helped to develop their personhood, identity and self-belief. They extended their communication repertoire using a range of media and genres, through performance and the production of materials for publication and distribution. They built new relationships and had the opportunity to build greater empathy with each other.

(2) High quality arts outcomes:
—Commissioned artists, with national and international reputations and commitment to community-based arts work, who were able to meet the expressed requirements and needs of partner institutions and participants. Artists not only engaged participants in authentic arts projects but also produced innovative participatory arts work with high quality aesthetic value. This was made possible by the continued involvement of highly skilled education curators who were able to establish relationships of trust with participating institutions.

(3) Outcomes of value for centre and school community members:
—Children and young people were involved, engaged and inspired. The participatory approach taken ensured positive and inclusive experiences for all participants, employing art forms and processes that developed their capacity to express themselves, their needs, aspirations and desires.

(4) Benefits for the wider community:
—Because the arts experiences on offer were positive, participatory and inclusive, parents and extended community networks had the opportunity to take ownership of arts projects and derive pleasure and enjoyment through making new connections and actively participating. Participants were seen as collaborators, and projects enabled them to make decisions about the places and spaces in which they live and work. Community links were forged and the sense of isolation and fragmentation in a gentrifying neighbourhood were countered.

(5) Benefits for artists, the gallery and the wider arts community:
—Artists benefited from the commission. Many had not worked with very young children and their parents before. The ongoing support and input of experienced education curators allowed them to explore a new area of practice.

—Serpentine Galleries’ commitment to the community in and around the Church Street area in north Westminster through community-based education programmes was enacted. The support for public institutions under pressure to conform and also save money was a tangible instance of the gallery’s civic responsibility. The practices of ongoing dialogue, reflection, review and modification allowed participants to voice aspirations, needs and interests through artistic means.

—The Serpentine Education Programme contributed to the public conversation about place, rights and social justice by producing and distributing materials, by running post-project workshops, and by publishing project descriptions, outcomes and materials online. Alliances with local, national and international networks have been strengthened through the dissemination of the work of the community-based arts projects.
Community-based arts work of the Serpentine Galleries’ Education curators and artists in the north Westminster area should continue to be supported, sustained and developed. In particular, the focus on working with children and young people through education institutions is productive and should be sustained and developed. The mediating role and experience of the education curators is crucial in developing and sustaining community-based arts work and they should be supported in this work. The processes of commissioning artists for community-based projects should continue to be developed and kept under review (as it is presently). Dissemination of project materials and processes are of national and international significance and value, and should continue to be supported by Serpentine Galleries and systematically expanded where possible.

Specifically, the Serpentine should:

(1) Continue to develop and sustain long-term commissions in collaboration with centres, schools and community groups.

(2) Maintain and extend its community-based programme, the tangible instantiation of its local civic responsibility. At a time when communities and the public institutions that serve them are increasingly marginalised by public policy, it is critically important that they are able to not only access cultural education but also co-construct its forms and functions.

(3) Investigate the possibility of a partnership project with the Portman Centre that places an atelierista in the centre. Such a position could support sustained professional staff development and continued benefits for children, as well as providing the basis for future professional development courses for the wider early childhood and artist communities.

(4) Investigate the potential for a more sustained engagement with young people in the final year of primary school that allows them to extend their newly formed capability to formulate and realise ideas and opinions through artistic projects, media and genres.

(5) Investigate the possibilities for teacher engagement with the alternative elective secondary school programme, Youth Forum, as well as extending it beyond the current ten-session format.

(6) Explore the capacity of charitable funding to support a new programme which has more emphasis on sustainable change via staff learning and extended networking. In the current climate, when arts provision in education is under threat and staff development is limited, more emphasis on working on programmes with professionals working with children and young people with interests in the arts is likely to broaden and sustain the impact of the work beyond individual projects. It would be complementary to the provision of direct benefits to children and young people.

Two main objectives set out by the Serpentine Galleries’ education curators motivated the research:

- To identify and articulate the benefits of the education programme for all participants.
- To promote the development, sustainability and resilience of the education programme.

In their work at the interface of arts practice and education in the programme, the Serpentine’s education curators have developed a positive, constructive and mutually developmental relationships between the gallery, artists, children and young people, their families, schools and wider communities through participatory and dialogic arts projects. The education team to promote participatory arts projects that place emphasis on:

- Children leading and at the centre of the arts work
- Engaging with families
- Engaging with and making positive contributions to the life of the wider community

There is a commitment in the Serpentine’s Education and Projects work to urban education and development, falling under five key themes:

- Rights to the city
- Children’s right to play
- Politics of care
- Migrations and movements
- Rethinking schools and schooling

Across these themes, and evident in the education team’s approach to their work with artists, there is evidence of an overarching concern with ‘care’ and its elaboration as a concept and in practice. It is an approach that is commensurate with Article 31 of the United Nations ‘Rights of the Child’, which gives emphasis to children’s and young people’s rights to play and engage in cultural life and arts.1 At the same time, there is currently a concern with how care and affective dimensions enter into educational work, whether in schooling (see e.g., Noddings, 2013), or in wider domains (see e.g., Nussbaum, 2001).

There are three strands to the Serpentine’s Offsite Education Programme:

Changing Play, working with young children and parents attached to the Portman Early Childhood Centre and,

1 http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/CHILD_E.PDF
from this collaboration, developing a series of workshops, training sessions and toolkits to connect with early years providers through London, the UK and internationally;

**Moving Up**, which has been working with 10- and 11-year-old Year 6 children attending Gateway Primary School designed to support the transition from primary to secondary schools. From this work, developing toolkits and workshops to connect more widely with school children, teachers and other professionals involved in working with children;

**Youth Forum**, a project forming part of the school’s work experience programme and working with 14- and 15-year-old young people in Year 10 at Westminster Academy who collaborate with artists to identify issues and to foster their agency and abilities to make changes in their lives.

### The Programme Philosophy

Working with children and young people in the community is an appropriate focus of a gallery’s education work. In scope and ambition, though, work on its various projects reaches beyond to the wider community, working with parents and local institutions. Through the community-based, participatory work of the programme the Serpentine Galleries extends its boundaries beyond its walls and location in the prosperous and verdant surroundings of Kensington Gardens. Through publications, the production of toolkits, the development of workshop series, publicising the work and its outcomes through material and digital channels, the programme develops its work rooted in a particular community, but branches into networks that extend across London, the UK and internationally.

One of the main motivations in the work of the Serpentine Education Programme is that the projects should contribute to developing a sense of agency to represent themselves through creative means and to advocate for social change through creative work.

The work of the programme as a whole is invariably dialogic, with artists and education curators actively engaging and involving children and young people alongside parents and staff who work with them. Outcomes, mediated through the work of artists and curators, represent the views of participants and advocates for issues of immediate concern to them and, in this way, enhances a sense of belonging and ownership over the arts work. Overall there is evidence that participants learn as individuals and within groups. The projects are concerned with both personal and social progression.

### Approaches to Research and Evaluation

The researchers commissioned for the evaluation of the Serpentine Education Programme, Professor Pat Thomson and Dr Anton Franks, operate out of the Centre for Research in Arts, Creativity and Literacies (CRACL) at the University of Nottingham’s School of Education. Between them, they have long and broad experience of researching the arts and education.

Predominantly drawing on ethnographic methods, the approach to research the programme was collaborative and participatory, informed from the outset by ongoing dialogue with education curators, with artists and, in the programme’s sites of activity, with participants. The focus, therefore, was on processes as well as outcomes, informed by an understanding of systems of commission and ongoing input, relationships between various participants, project activities and events, and conversations between various participants and stakeholders.

In the evaluative aspects of the research, it was influenced by an approach to evaluation ethnography (Butler, 2015). In such an approach, researchers seek to take account of multiple perspectives, looking for patterns across the range of participants, sites and activities using a variety of methods.

The ethical stance taken in the research goes beyond institutional requirements of confidentiality, anonymity and prevention of harm, to prioritising quality in technical process, honesty and integrity, respect for people, and the production of ‘good’. It is an approach that emphasises respect for all participants and seeks to evaluate how the projects augment the experiences of all participants, including artists, staff and education curators alongside those of the children, young people, parents and members of the community.

Because the projects forming parts of the programme were predicated on participatory arts practices, it was important that the approach involved the participation of the researcher in arts activities and interaction with the range of participants in situ. Such participation was necessary, in part because working with children (particularly young children) and young people will rarely allow distanced observation as most often children will want to draw in the full participation of observers, but also because of the intensely sensory aspects of arts-based work. Ethnographic research of arts projects thus always means the incorporation of the arts under investigation. The art form and its concerns are integral to participation. Coming from a background involving the teaching and learning of drama, field researcher for the project Anton Franks is particularly interested and experienced in looking at co-constructed activity involving the placing and movement of whole
persons—thinking, feeling, active bodies—socially arranged in particular
spaces and places engaging in cultural activity (e.g. Franks, 2014).

Various approaches to art-making in projects, particularly
art-making that involves the active participation of children, young people
and adults, involves the generation of multiple signs and modes of
meaning-making. Education Curator Alex Thorp told us ‘Listening to
what the children are saying is important. Listening is a radical act,
necessary to understanding what they [the children] are doing.’ It is
a socio-political ethos underlyng the work of many engaged in arts
learning. The Serpentine education curators believe that everyone
can be creative and be an artist, and that art institutions don’t have a
monopoly on art. Their practice therefore is always based in identifying
exclusions, establishing relationships, building trust, and designing
programmes that enable participants to shape their experiences of
arts projects they are involved in.

In terms of specific methods for the research reported in
what follows, a variety of research methods were used at various times
in different projects for generating the data, which included:

—Pre- and post-project discussion with Serpentine education curators.
—Pre- and post-project discussions and interviews with artists.
—Observation and participation of a sample of project sessions,
including working alongside participants and, where possible, engaging
in ongoing conversations with children, young people, artists, staff and
education curators.
—Writing field notes on location for all projects.
—Collecting still and moving digital images.
—Participation in post-session reflective discussions with artists, education
curators and staff.
—Post-project discussion with teachers and a focus group of participating
Year 6 children on the ‘Moving Up’ project.
—Post-project online survey of children involved in ‘Moving Up’.
—Ongoing review of relevant policy documents and research literature.

It is important to note, however, that a research focus is not the preserve
of externally commissioned researchers. For the Serpentine Galleries’
education curators, and for the artists they commission for the various
projects of the programme, a research perspective is seen as important
and integral to the participatory art-making process. The influence of
child, art-centred approaches developed in Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2001)
can be clearly detected in the emphasis on listening to children. In this
context, listening can be seen to accrue an expanded metaphorical
meaning, referring not only to aural qualities of communication, but to
the many ways that the young children communicate through the whole
of their activity—how objects are used, their gestures, expressions and
interactions with peers and adults, and so forth. Such a multimodal
approach to making meaning (Kress, 2010), particularly as it is applied
to young children, resonates with the Mosaic approach to research with
young children (Clark and Moss, 2011).

Finally, a note on how individual projects were sampled,
observed and participated in. The process was negotiated between field
researcher Anton Franks and Serpentine Education Curator Alex Thorp. In
the course of research, five projects that were part of Changing Play were
visited by Anton and two by associate researcher Louisa Penfold, whereas
only one iteration of Moving Up and one of Youth Forum were sampled
by Anton, detailed in the following table. This is reflected in the case study
section later in this report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project and Artists</th>
<th>Venue &amp; Dates</th>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changing Play</td>
<td>Portman Early Childhood Centre</td>
<td>Anton Franks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahbak Hashemi-Nezhad</td>
<td>Obs. March–May 2017</td>
<td>Louisa Penfold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelita Husni-Bey</td>
<td>Obs. October–November 2017, Obs. April 2018</td>
<td>Anton Franks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving Up</td>
<td>Cockpit Theatre</td>
<td>Anton Franks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam James</td>
<td>Obs. May 2016, Interviews with AJ May &amp; July 2016</td>
<td>Anton Franks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Forum</td>
<td>Westminster Academy, Obs. Workshop April 2017</td>
<td>Anton Franks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Education Programme has three significant features:

1. It is based on a coherent pedagogical philosophy

   The programme places agency at its heart. One of its key influences, particularly for Changing Play, is the text ‘Loose Parts’ (Nicholson 2009) which advocates for children being able to curate and remix not only objects but also their learning environments. The programme is also influenced by the concept of ‘care’, taken to mean the practices of carefully attending to what others say and don’t say, decide and desire. This is an approach which refuses the separation of minds, bodies and affect, and instead offers opportunities for ‘whole’ person experiences within socially supportive settings. Complementary to the emphasis on care is a concern for social justice and social change for which there is greater need in these times than in recent times.

2. It is a three-way partnership in which projects are negotiated, planned and implemented

   The education curators at the Serpentine Galleries are committed to, and practise, shared planning and reflection. The offer that they make to artists is not simply to undertake an art project, but to work closely and collaboratively with them throughout. The institutions where they work are engaged in determining what kinds of projects are needed, and which media and genres might be appropriate. To facilitate such a partnership, for example, the artists commissioned to work with the Portman Early Childhood Centre are invited (and paid) to spend three days becoming familiar with the work, staff and users of the centre, after which the artists’ proposals are shared with the centre for approval, comments and feedback. The role of the learning curators is distinctive; they are continually engaged in reflection, conversation, mediation and negotiation with artist, institution and participants in order to ensure the projects are successful. All projects have sought to develop questions to focus activities, and in a second phase a tangible expression of the project’s ‘answers’ has been produced and disseminated.

3. The programmes are continually under critical review and subject to ongoing modification

   Unlike some approaches to programming, this is an iterative model where the line of development, for the most part, grows from the activities themselves. Process and outcome are not predetermined but are subject to change, as materials, activities and genres are adapted to follow the lead set by children and young people. Dialogue and reflection, and the development of guiding questions for the project (see Appendix 1), are integral aspects of this programming approach.

In this section of the report, we provide a short summary of each project together with a synthesis of outcomes. Full ethnographic descriptions are available in Volume 2.
Albert Potrony, ‘Play as Radical Practice’, May 2016–July 2018

The artist commissioned for the project, Albert Potrony, works with groups to produce films, sound works, collaborative constructed environments, or installations, and sees his work as being ‘participatory’ and ‘a socially engaged practice’. He had previously worked with young children, although not as young as nursery-age children. For Changing Play he provided a range of materials and objects, some from the Scrap Project, but others bought from builders’ merchants, including: sheets of foam (shaped and with holes cut in), corrugated PVC sheeting, nylon cord, clips, reflective insulating material, tube foam insulation, large sheets of corrugated card, PVC mirror shapes, and LED lamps (that fitted into holes cut in foam). Materials chosen and adapted by the artist provided an enriched play environment, augmenting the provision of the Portman Early Childhood Centre to stimulate a range of imaginative play activities.

The choices presented—children could choose if, when and how they wanted to engage in play with materials—and the openness of the play environment in the richness of materials offered afforded many opportunities for individual and social development for the children. Benefits were perceived for the artist, the Children’s Centre staff, the institution as a whole, and for the Serpentine Galleries’ education curators. In the second phase of the project Albert developed an early years atelier that extended into the surrounding park and was free and open to local nurseries and primary schools at the Serpentine Galleries. He produced a range of materials in the form of a pack—Play as Radical Practice—for use by other artists, curators and early childhood educators, supporting early years educators to develop strong relationships with children, and promoting free play activities for the state school system.

Key benefits for children and staff

Through the use of ‘large manipulable’ materials children were able to:
— develop a sense of agency through the systematic process of choice
— explore the properties of the materials—card, rope, foil etc.
— develop early experiential learning in scientific and mathematical thinking
— construct sustained narratives which brought together their everyday experiences with their imagined worlds, the foundations for literacy
— work in collaborative ways with other children and adults
— extend vocabulary and spoken communication
— reflect on their experience through the use of artist-produced visual documentation
— develop gross and fine motor skills

Staff benefited from the chance to observe, reflect on and discuss children and their play. The toolkit and its launch provide a resource for staff to support their ongoing work.


The first part of Bahbak Hashemi-Nezhad’s residency was undertaken at the Portman Early Childhood Centre between February and May 2017. Bahbak explored the possibilities and limitations of the urban environment as a space for children’s play. Over ten half-day sessions, Bahbak worked with the Serpentine Galleries’ education team and Portman Centre staff, taking small groups of children out of the Centre to an open space at the base of Parsons House, a high-rise housing block off the Edgware Road in north Westminster.

Bahbak was particularly interested in using the sessions to think about the limitations and possibilities of neighbourhood spaces for children’s play, the limitations of formal playgrounds and the imaginative potential of non-prescriptive urban spaces. During each session, low-cost objects and materials such as ropes, wooden planks, plastic crates and trolleys were introduced for children to use and play with within this empty and somewhat desolate open space of concrete paving stones at the foot of a tower block.

Bahbak’s final workshop in this part of the Changing Play series brought together families and children from the centre through an open invitation for all parents to join in a group play session at Parson’s House. Children were able to share their favourite discoveries of the space with their families and play together in the urban space.

As an extension of his residency, Hashemi-Nezhad produced a short film featuring images from the project. In addition, he created a series of adult and children’s play kits for local children’s centres to use to help identify and activate spaces for free play within the city. The kits were launched with a series of workshops in October 2018.

Key benefits for children and staff

Through the use and re-use of materials, children were able to:
— engage in strenuous physical play and explore the capacities of their bodies
— take managed risks
— claim and explore the potentials of a largely disused public space
— use simple, readily available and re-usable materials for play
— develop action narratives
— work together and make shared decisions
— get to know their own locality better
— share their experiences with their families

Staff were able to:
— observe opportunities for children’s imaginative play in outdoor urban settings outside the centre
— see how materials might be repurposed for and in play
— consider the limits and possibilities of safe risk-taking for children in outdoor urban settings.
The creative practice of Adam and Emma featured numerous collaborations with families and children with disabilities. The Portman Centre has an unusually high number of special needs children enrolled. This is a deliberate policy by the centre, as there are inadequate provisions available for special needs at local nurseries and primary schools. The artists’ residency provided rich possibilities for further exploration and discussion with families about their experiences and unmet needs. This was a welcome opportunity for parents to voice their concerns and frustrations with the current landscape of special needs education.

Throughout their residency, Emma and Adam worked to produce a series of play sessions comprised of sensory-rich environments featuring materials such as soil, bricks, metallic ventilation pipes, thermal blankets and foam blocks. The artists approached the sessions as a series of experiments that they could use to observe and respond to the natural interactions that occurred between the children, the staff and the materials. Over the course of four months the group developed a book, which centres on the following questions: Why and how are children with SEND being failed by the education system? How might adopting a special rights approach improve experiences for children with SEND? How can parents and carers come together with early years workers to create a network of support and solidarity? The book Special Rights was launched by parents with education and health professionals in November 2018.

Key benefits for children and parents

Children were able to:
— explore their senses
— experiment with the properties of a range of materials
— build sensory appreciation
— develop fine and gross motor skills
— practice communication and social skills
— explore imaginative play and curiosities
— play in a non-judgmental and encouraging environment
— explore space, measurement and size
— work with other children on common activities

Parents benefited from:
— witnessing their children engaged in creative, free play
— opportunities to share experiences with others in a supportive environment
— engaging in collective action to campaign for better resources of support for their children and themselves

Adelita Husni-Bey worked at the Portman Early Childhood Centre on Wednesday mornings, in autumn 2017. She worked with a group of parents and staff on issues to do with care—among other aspects, how parents and childhood centre staff care for children, how staff care for parents, and exploring how children might care for parents. A wider dimension of Adelita's work was designed to stimulate ways of caring when ‘care systems’ and structures are under extreme pressure.

The commission began with structured exercises designed to generate trust. She used newspaper articles to stimulate discussion, read children’s books with parents, and produced drawings based on the discussions. This discussion-based process led to an Augusto Boal-inspired activity in which parents and staff generated ‘scenes of oppression’. The project also worked with storyboards and personal narratives. The end result was a shared story about care.

Adelita is now producing a book about the project in which she will bring the narrative and images together to form a children’s book. The intention is to circulate the book to families and other education settings.

Key benefits for children and staff

— The exploration of the idea and practices of care
— Develop trust through shared conversations
— The opportunity to give voice to social and economic concerns
— A place to tell your story and have it listened to
— An opportunity to understand each other’s everyday lives and pasts
— Dialogue about contemporary political issues and aspects of care and carelessness
— Exploration of alternative approaches to education
— Development of a shared narrative celebrating care and difference
Jasleen’s project took place in the Portman Centre’s Drop-In sessions for parents with babies and toddlers over ten sessions between 1.30pm and 3.30pm on Wednesday afternoons, from the end of January to early April 2018.

Having spent three research days at the Portman Centre, observing activity and speaking with children, parents and staff, Jasleen wrote in her proposal about her interest in ‘pursuing the micro-politics of cooking and eating together, to engage in macro-politics concerning the site and community of Portman Early Childhood Centre’ to ‘reinvigorate the cooking club of 2008’ that had been cut due to a lack of funding in the wake of the global economic crash. She wanted sessions to revolve around the making of bread, ‘taking it in turns each week to share a recipe, technique or culturally significant bread.’ Her choice of the making and eating of bread was because she is ‘interested in bread as something social and political’ and stems from an awareness that as ‘the simplest of food sources’, bread may be denied to poorer people, sparking food riots and social unrest, while the ‘healthiest options’ of food are always available to people who have more access to greater financial, cultural and material resources.

In the next phase of her project, Jasleen led four workshops with mothers from the project, further workshopping the key questions that emerged through the project. Her intention now is to produce a picnic blanket that will feature conversations, questions and issues that have arisen during the project.

Key benefits for children and parents

— Creation of an intergenerational safe space for dialogue.
— Parents identified raced and gendered experiences in common with each other and the artist.
— Exploration of the place of food as an everyday cultural practice.
— Opportunity to discuss health issues.
— Opportunities for children to join with parents in food preparation
— Children and parents investigated the sensory properties of food.
— Explore facets of care and support, particularly in relation to immigrant experiences in contemporary Britain.
— Establish a temporary space in which experiences of heritage and displacement could be shared.
— Opportunity to develop capacity in speaking English.

The Moving Up project worked with Year 6 children (10- and 11-years-old) from Gateway Academy Primary School, located off Lisson Grove close to Church Street and drawing its students from the surrounding area. The students at Gateway derive from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A large proportion of the intake have English as an additional language (EAL) and 57% of students are eligible for free school meals, indicating a high level of those who come from low-income households.

Taking place towards the end of their final year at Gateway, the aim of the Moving Up project, developed from discussion with teachers at the school, was to help students prepare for their transition to secondary school the following September. In May 2016, the third year that Moving Up had run with students from Gateway Academy, the project ran for four days. Adam was assisted by James Harper, who was trained in drama, had run his own theatre company, and had connected with Adam through their common interest in live action role-playing (LARP).

After the project with the children, it was disseminated through a free week-long workshop series for local schools at the Serpentine Galleries, a printed toolkit designed to support teachers to develop a similar project in schools, and an educators’ event.

Key benefits for children and staff

— Opportunities to think about what was important in moving to a new school.
— Role-play activities provided an enjoyable way to think through potentially sensitive issues, e.g. making new friends, working collaboratively, and adjusting to a new environment.
— Developing understanding through exploring the power of metaphorical structures as a way of thinking things through creatively and productively.
— Opportunity to make things and to be creative in the making of creatures and shelters.
— Exercising and stretching their expressive and communicative capacities through words, gestures and choreographed movement.
— Reflective discussion contributed to the students’ ability to conceptualise their experiences in the sessions and relate them to their everyday lives.
— Ability to work collaboratively and resolve tensions was clearly enhanced.
— Enhanced confidence and sense of well-being.

---

The project took place in periods allocated by the school for work experience. It consisted of a two week workshop followed by a day workshop in school. The project led to the production of a booklet—*The Lexicon of Labour*. The students were engaged in arts-based activities, working with the two artists, Barby and Teresa, within artistic frameworks and toward artistic objectives and outcomes. The project provoked critical ways of thinking about and responding to the world of work, its relationships and structures, employing different modes and media of the arts that enabled the young people to select, shape and form ideas, with the sense of communicating perceptions, ideas and attitudes to others in creative ways.

In this project, arts work included making collages, taking words and images from magazines and from the internet. They also devised and filmed short scenes about work. These images would feed ultimately into the compilation and construction of a ‘Lexicon of Labour’, an A-Z of labour, to be published in a book form within the year.

**Key benefits for children and parents**

— Explored the affordances of film, animation and collage.
—Expressed their views and interpretations through still and moving image.
—Visited Tate and explored the nature of work in the gallery.
—Responded to artworks they found interesting and relevant.
—Learned about contemporary issues in work, including precarity.
—Investigated issues about race and gender in relation to both identity and work.
—Engaged in debate and discussion about work, working relations and current working conditions.
—Experienced learning in an alternative place and way.
—Developed capacity for critical and reflective discussion about human relationships.
—Devised and led workshops for their peers, learning and practicing leadership.
—Experienced a different sense of self and agency to their schooling ‘norm’.

[https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/learn/youth-forum/lexicon-labour](https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/learn/youth-forum/lexicon-labour)
The programme at the Portman Centre took place over a long period of time. This allowed a trusting relationship to be built up between the learning curators and the Portman Centre staff particularly with Jo White, Head of Centre. The iterative planning model was dependent on ongoing conversations between the learning curators and Jo.

It appeared to us that one of Jo’s concerns was to ensure that every part of the Centre had some experience of working with artists. Thus, over the life of the programme, different members of staff and various groups—the coffee morning, the Drop-In centre for parents and babies, the nursery—all had the opportunity to engage with an artist. This ‘spread’ ensured that the overall organisational culture was influenced by the programme and it was not confined to one area.

Because a large number of people were engaged over time with the programme, it also offered the opportunity for an ongoing multi-voiced conversation to occur between the Serpentine (education curators) and the Portman Early Childhood Centre (Head of Centre Jo White and various participants.) Because the education curators and Jo were continually present this also afforded them the information necessary to engage in iterative planning—ensuring that each commission followed a line of inquiry opened up in the previous one.

The changing nature of commissions and participants means that it is somewhat difficult to determine sustained benefits for individual children, parents or staff. Jo, is clear that the various commissions encouraged staff to be reflective and ask more critical questions about children’s development and learning. Our observation was that staff had different levels of engagement—some took the opportunity of the artist-led sessions to join in and extend their own thinking and experiences with children while others saw an opportunity to deal with pressing tasks.

This kind of spread of engagement and participation clearly has implications for sustainability. While there is little doubt that children, and some parents and staff, benefited greatly from the programme, the offer was not consistent or evenly distributed. This raises the question of how greater impact might be achieved.

The education programme is externally funded. This is undoubtedly part of its attraction to the Portman Centre which has been under severe financial pressure. It may be the case that some level of external funding is still required to support the development of the programme in future, but this might also have a stronger emphasis on the creation of a self-sustaining model.

In thinking about how the Serpentine Education Programme might be sustained we have considered the following:

1. The work of the artists, and their success, was dependent on the brokerage and mediation of the learning curators and Jo.
2. The Portman has an ambition to share their commitment to, and expertise in, play-based pedagogies with other early childhood settings.

However, artists and educational staff are not interchangeable. They have different and, as has been shown in the programme, complementary expertise. Their work can be brought together in overlapping activities such as planning, documentation and reflection.

And, importantly, sustainability implies a level of autonomy:

1. Sustainable change occurs when a programme is embedded in one or more institutions and is seen as integral to their ongoing work.
2. Sustainability is enhanced if the institutions are able to gain some kind of reputational or economic benefit from sharing/selling their practice.

We think that there is some mileage in thinking about an atelierista model.

This would place an artist, paid as a teaching assistant, into the Portman Centre for one or two days a week. They would be part of the permanent staffing complement, attending staff meetings and so on. They would also be part of the Serpentine Learning team and join in CPD and planning meetings with the gallery. They would be able to support, on an ongoing basis, the work of making ‘loose parts’ integral to the everyday programming in the centre. The presence of an atelierista would also allow the Portman Centre to work with the Serpentine on commissioned projects to supplement their work. More importantly, the atelierista and their work would provide the basis for the Serpentine and the Portman Centre to build a professional learning programme which could be offered to early childhood staff and to artists and learning curators keen to extend their repertoires of practice.

(1)
(2)
The Moving Up programme is the smallest that we observed in terms of time. Eighty children from Year 6 took part over two days, split into two groups. The children valued the opportunity to work outside of their set or friendship groups and it was evident that they understood the importance of relationships as promoted by the project. The timing, after SATs, suggests that this was a kind of bubble in which the children were allowed to be and do something different. While there were some immediate and obvious benefits for the young people, this kind of short-term one-off is limited in its scope. Teachers were present but variously involved. It is unlikely that they will incorporate any of pedagogies on offer into their own repertoires.

This is perhaps the kind of activity that might be offered in order to establish a deeper and more ongoing relationship with the Serpentine. It is a beginning, in which the gallery offer is seen to be useful and of benefit. It could develop through a joint partnership to offer an ‘art club’ or to support classroom teachers to develop their own art programmes. Most primary teachers have little formal arts training—in music, visual, and performing arts. They often lack confidence in staging the kind of large-scale and higher risk activities that were offered through Moving Up. There is some mileage, in our view, to thinking of how the Serpentine might add to the Moving Up programme by supporting some ongoing work alongside teachers. This might also be a way to influence the school more generally.

Youth Forum offers a two-week engagement with artists to a group of fifteen or so Year 10 students, some of whom decide to stay and take part in another project later in the year. The offer to the school is of an alternative learning environment, and students choose to attend. While many of them are ‘struggling’, this was not the case for all. The project is spread across a school year and offered as two-week long workshops and a follow up day. The project is presented to students as an alternative work experience placement.

No teacher is required to attend. This practice is in some contrast to most arts education programmes where a teacher is normally expected to be continually present, in part for safety reasons but also to ensure that they know what has happened and are able to follow up any issues. There is also the opportunity in artist-led school programmes for teacher learning. The benefit of not having a teacher present is that some degree of separation from school culture and identities is made possible. This potentially allows the student to speak more freely and establish different relationships with the adults present.

Within a relatively large secondary school such as Westminster Academy (just over 1000 students), this is a small offering in both time and numbers. Given the pressures on secondary schools for performance and results, and the lack of teachers present, it is highly unlikely that the Forum will have any effect on the workings of the wider school. The expectation must therefore be that the major beneficiaries will be the students who attend. However, it is unclear what kind of benefit accrues to students if they have a one-off experience of another mode of learning. This may be beneficial or even transformative for some, but this will depend on opportunities available to them later or in places other than school.

One way to make this programme more effective for young people is to offer a more sustained engagement over time. This could be in the form of an out-of-school club held at the school or on the Edgware Road in community premises. Being able to take the learning from the intensive workshops and develop them further over time would offer real opportunities to continue the young people’s contact with contemporary arts practices, particularly those directed towards community engagement and social action.

If there is a desire to influence the school as an institution, then some consideration must be given to finding an authoritative adult within the school who might develop ways to either allow the young people to exercise voice and influence in the school, or to work on the pedagogical principles of the programme to see what they might have to offer teachers more generally.

It seems unlikely that, in the current financial climate, the school will be able to fund the programme themselves, but it might be possible to rebadge it somewhat in order to make it eligible for a Pupil Premium strategy. This would, of course, tie the aims of the programme more strongly to that of the school and this may not be desirable.
Why do we work and how do we work?
How do we navigate uncertain futures?
What does it mean to succeed? What does it mean to fail?
What are our rights in relation to work?
How can we support one another to move through school structures?
Can we role-play different ways of being together in school?
What does it mean to be ‘school-ready’?
How could we prepare primary schools to be child-ready?
How can we support free play in early years settings?
What are the physical and imaginative qualities of a play space?
Where are the spaces for children in the city?
Why and how are children with SEND being failed by the education system?
How might adopting a special rights approach improve experiences for children with SEND?
How can parents and carers come together with early years workers to create a network of support and solidarity?
What are our care relationships?
What does it mean to care when the structures of care are being dismantled?
What are our concerns and how do we remedy?
How do we hold onto and pass down culture?
How do we care and how are we cared for?

Barby Asante & Teresa Cisneros
Youth Forum

Adam James
Moving Up

Albert Potrony
Changing Play

Bahbakin Hashemi-Nezhad
Changing Play

Emma McGarry & Adam J B Walker
Changing Play

Adelita Husni-Bey
Changing Play

Jasleen Kaur
Changing Play

ACE Quality Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serpentine Education principles and practices</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>— Commissioning artists with experience of work with children and young people</td>
<td>— High levels of participation in high quality arts processes and experiences alongside artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Bespoke programmes matching aims and needs of participants</td>
<td>— Production, publication and dissemination of high-quality materials at end of projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Ongoing review &amp; development through projects</td>
<td>— High-quality production values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Commissioning artists with international reputations</td>
<td>— Children and young people produce art materials for display and dissemination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Real arts activities appropriate to group, age-range and needs</td>
<td>— Children, young people and staff in host organisations engaged in ongoing reflective discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Working alongside experienced, excellent artists</td>
<td>— Engagement in issues relevant to participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Wide-ranging arts activities matching interests and level of children and young people</td>
<td>— All projects involve full participation of children, young people and staff with commissioned artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Curators facilitate ongoing dialogue between participants, artists and host organisations</td>
<td>— Respect and status ascribed to all participants, their views, expressed desires and needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Actively involving children and young people
   —Curators encourage child- and youth-centred approaches
   —Hands on participatory arts activities
   —Hands-on production of artworks

6 Enabling personal progression
   —Focus on child- and youth-centred learning
   —Identifying perceived and expressed needs and desires, ensuring feedthrough into arts activities
   —Explicit focus on learning and development of all participants

7 Developing belonging and ownership
   —Curators facilitate ongoing reflective discussion and review between artists, children, young people and staff in host organisations
   —Arts work inclusive and participatory
   —Ongoing reflection and review involving all participants
   —Pride and self-respect resulting from end-of-project production
   —High quality production values

References