



ArtWorks Cymru.

‘Made By Hand’ Learning Group Report

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Contents Page

ArtWorks Cymru learning groups	2
‘Made by Hand’ project	2
Learning group findings	3
Key findings	3
Valuing the different groups	4
Artists and organisations	4
Artists and participants	6
Feeling proud of the project	11
Artists	11
Participants	12
Organisations	13
Creating shared ownership	14
What skills to artists employ?	14
Context specific approaches	17
Art form specific skills – dance	17
Art form specific skills – textiles	18
How do artists learn skills?	18
Shared Values and beliefs	19
Other Issues	20
Conclusions	21
 Appendix 1: ArtWorks Cymru – Guidance for bloggers	23
Appendix 2: Mind maps created from learning group sessions	24
Appendix 3: Head for Arts project aims and outcomes	26

ArtWorks Cymru Learning Groups.

As part of the second phase of ArtWorks Cymru five participatory arts projects were run as part of the research. Each project had four learning group meetings in which members of the creative teams explored and discussed a set of themed questions in which to explore their participatory practice. The aim was to capture the processes that the artists employed as they embarked on a project as well as to capture the learning and the development of the project. Artists were also encouraged to draw from their previous experience and share their knowledge and learning from the whole of their careers.

Members of the learning groups were selected by the organisation running each project. The sessions were all audio-recorded and transcribed for research purposes. Learning group sessions included a new or emerging artist as well as more experienced artists. As well as participating in learning group sessions, the emerging artist was invited to keep an online blog of their experiences and observations. The artist blog can be viewed at: <http://artistsblog.artworkscymru.org/> [please see appendix 1, page 23, for ArtWorks Cymru's guide to bloggers].

'Made by Hand' explored the theme of ownership by discussing a different set question at each meeting. These questions were:

1. How do you balance the competing agendas in the project?
2. What skills or methods are the artists employing to create shared ownership between artists and participants?
3. How can meaningful and creative participatory experiences be developed within situations where the artist is under pressure to deliver a high quality product?
4. What does ownership mean for artists, participants and organisations?

[Please see appendix 2 to view the mind maps of each of the learning group conversations. Page 24]

All quotations shown within this report are from the transcripts of the learning group sessions unless otherwise stated.

'Made by Hand' project.

The 'Made by Hand' project was developed and commissioned by Head for Arts and involved a team of artists working with women from Heads of the Valleys communities. Participants were involved in completing a textiles piece which was then used as inspiration for a performance installation comprising film, live performance and music. The piece featured as part of the Adain Avion in Ebbw Vale, which was one of the flagship public arts commissions for the cultural Olympiad in July 2012, curated by Marc Rees.

The project was specifically aimed at economically inactive women. As well as the artistic outcomes, the project also assessed the participants' personal development [please see appendix 3, page 26 for further information on the aims and outcomes for the project].

Three artists were involved in the Made by Hand learning groups, and these included a textile artist, a choreographer and dance artist, and an emerging artist with a background in music. For the final learning group session the creative project manager from Head for Arts also attended.

Due to small sample within this learning group, it is not expected that these findings are representative of all artists; however, it does provide in-depth knowledge on the beliefs, approaches and values of some artists who work in participatory settings.



Learning Group Findings.

Key findings

Artists within the learning group agreed that developing and sharing ownership was complex and subtle. During the four learning group sessions, several key themes emerged when discussing 'ownership':

- Participants, artists, and organisations involved in participatory projects all need to feel valued.
- Organisations, artists and participants all need to feel pride in the project and the final product.
- Artists employ a variety of skills to develop shared ownership.
- Shared values, beliefs, and responsibilities are important when developing shared ownership.
- Artists utilise mentors, supportive organisations, observation, and discussion as the main methods of gaining their skills.

Valuing the different groups

“So I value everyone’s contribution and I would hope that they all value what everyone is contributing.”

Artists within the learning group agreed that ownership of a project should be shared and should include not only the participants, but also the organisations involved, as well as the artists themselves. To ensure a successful participatory arts project all groups had to feel valued.

Artists and organisations

“Although they’re very different agendas, they do link in a lot of ways. It’s, y’ know, there is a lot of threads that goes between them”.

The Made by Hand project involved a wide number of organisations and agendas which included, but was not limited to, Paul Hamlyn and ArtWorks Cymru, Adain Avion, Communities First, Head for Arts, and the participants. Artists found it extremely helpful that the **different agendas were discussed** and made explicit at the beginning of the project. By making the different agendas explicit artists felt able to make more sense of the project during their own planning of the project:

“[Head for Arts] went through this and it was really good because it’s taken me quite a long time to get my head around this because it’s so big and there’s so many layers. And obviously I use my book to work through things and I found that really helpful that she’d gone through it.”

“It’s a lot of deciphering, it was a lot of deciphering in the beginning wasn’t it?”

Artists within the learning group used a variety of methods to make sense of the projects, and different agendas, that they were involved in:

- Artists used scrap books to collate thoughts and explore ideas.
- Artists also used notebooks to develop storyboards and plan logistics;
- Artists employed quiet reflection to consider the various agendas and how to meet them.

“And so, like, just me working through [the project brief], picking out words, assimilating them for myself, helps me to pick it to the bones of what it’s after. And then I deliver that and explain it I suppose.”

Although each organisation or group appeared to have competing agendas, artists within the learning group believed that part of their role was to **see the “common threads”** and develop a participatory project that fulfilled each person’s agendas as far as possible; the artists believed that they were able to ensure shared ownership with the different groups involved by understanding the different agendas and searching for the “common threads”.

In order to develop a project that could satisfy the different agendas artists expected that lead organisations would develop, and share, a **clear set of aims and outcomes** to enable the artists to understand the brief clearly. Artists valued receiving a clear brief as part of a face-to-face meeting

where questions could be asked and issues discussed. A clear brief enabled the artistic director to understand the main aims of the project and to understand where there was flexibility for interpretation and development:

“For me it was really important to have it all really clear, y’ know. What you [the organisation] expect, and then for me at that stage... was when it was: how flexible is this part of your agenda, and how flexible is this part?”

“[The project] could be many different things. So, I’ve kind of tried to find what the boundaries are of this, and then I think it’s up to us as a team to discuss what [the project might be]- as it’s going on.”

Whilst clear aims and structures were important, artists within the learning group were keen to stress that there still needed to be **space within the project** to enable development, flexibility, and change:

“Although we had really clear structured framework which we have pretty much stuck to, things have kind of organically shifted and changed. Same with outcomes have shifted and changed. We were talking about it last week when we thought there’d actually be a bit more actual participants dancing, y’ know, at some point but that’s just not possible within... their lives and within the structure. The room we were ‘making’ in, for example, wouldn’t have been suitable to do dancing. But also there’s no way there’s time to make the wall hanging – and do all the making for that – and do a dance. And I think it would have been too much too soon within this project.”

Artists believed it was important to discuss the aims and outcomes, the different agendas, and the **flexibility** of the project with the lead organisation. Information helped artists reflect on the project and understand how the project may be taken forward. Artists within the learning group also felt that discussing this at an initial meeting helped to establish good communication between artist and organisation at an early stage.

On-going **support and communication** between the organisation and the creative team was also considered important. Both artists and organisations found that strong links and communication helped ensure the project ran smoothly due to the sharing of feedback and information:

“I felt very comfortable with... [Head for Arts] on-going support.”

“It’s been quite nice... to know that [Head for Arts] valued the things I’ve been able to tell [them]. Y’ know, at meetings I’ve made sure I’ve made notes and then passed those on... so it means that avenues of communication are still kept open and no one feels like ‘Oh I didn’t know about that!’”

“[Organisations need to be] recognising our own creative role in putting the recipe together... A feeling of successful ownership is when you feel *part* of the creative team and not outside of it.”¹

The artists within the learning group felt particularly strongly that communication between the participants/audience and artists also had to be suitable, planned, and clear; those who had a background in the project, or felt some sense of shared ownership were felt to be in the best position to share information on the project. Good communication between organisation, participant, and artist were believed to help foster a feeling of shared ownership:

“... for me it was really important that the audience felt really welcome and felt that they understood what was happening, why it was happening, where it had come from, and what the rules were for the space. ‘Cause it was quite a new experience for a lot of the audience. Well, it was a new experience for me going into a plane to watch an art performance!”

“...for the final performance I was... on stewarding duties, following feedback I gave to the Artistic Director about the lack of forthcoming information about the project from the 'official' stewards.”²

Both artists and organisations felt very strongly that it was important that the art, and the experience that participants went through, was **inspirational**. Artists and organisations believed that it was important to create good art that was valued by the wider arts community, as well as participants. Creating good art enabled all parties to feel ownership of the project as it instilled pride and led to recognition for what was achieved:

“At the end of the day – never mind all of the outcomes, and the funding, and the delivery – if we’re not delivering good art, and it’s not recognised as being valuable artistically, then we’ve failed.”³

Artists within the learning group enjoyed working with organisations who shared these values and approaches. Artists felt valued within the project when they were involved in the planning and development of a project at an early stage. As well as **sharing values**, beliefs, and approaches, artists also wanted to be valued for their role of protecting participants and their ability to share ownership with the participants in the project.

Artists and participants

“Everyone is creative. And I keep writing that down and I showed them today... ‘cause I want them to realise that”.

Artists recognised that they brought their own agendas to a participatory project, however, these agendas were not extensively discussed with the creative team during the lifetime of the project.

¹ Creative project manager, Head for Arts

² Artist blog July 19 2012

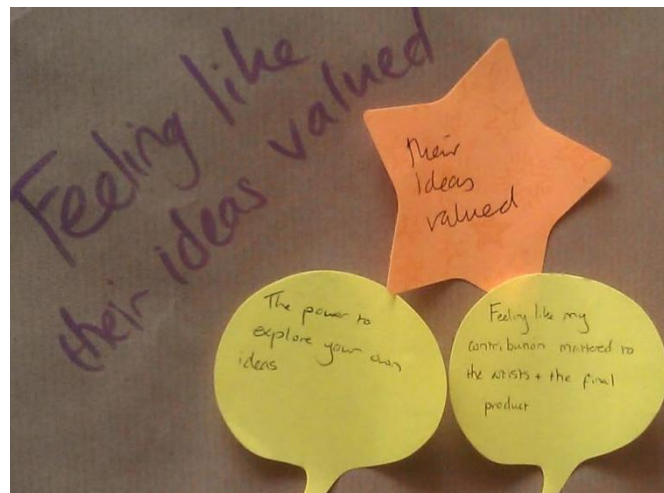
³ Creative project manager, Head for Arts

Artists chose not to discuss this extensively so as not to influence the direction of the project with their own ideas:

“It is kind of hard not to have some pictures of what we might like. Like, that’s our agendas, isn’t it? ... I mean, we might not even share those ‘cause, like, they’re just inside us... But we wouldn’t wanna be talking about those ‘cause we don’t want those to become concrete or influence [the project].”

Artists chose not to discuss their own ideas extensively because it was important to the creative team that participants were able to share their ideas and ‘own’ the project. Artists within the learning group were very clear that the **participants would always be the most important** group within a participatory arts project; participants should always feel valued and have ownership of a project. Participants should always be used as the starting point and “source material” for any project, and participants need to feel comfortable to share their ideas and creativity. To enable participants to explore their creativity artists needed space within the project to allow for exploration and development; flexibility within an established framework was required:

“[Artists need to be] *flexible*... if the plan needs to shift in relation to what the participants are wanting to get into it. I think we’re all very open... Y’ know, we can *shift* that part of the project...”



In order for artists to be flexible to the needs of the participants’ artists need to be able to recognise the **agenda of the participants**. Members of the learning group acknowledged that participants attend participatory projects for a variety of reasons and it is the responsibility of the artist to **build relationships** with the participants in order to build rapport and develop an understanding of the participants’ background and agendas:

“The participants, as individuals, will have an agenda: why are they coming? Because they want to practice sewing? Because they want to do something nice and there’s a crèche there and that’s helpful?”

“...what is crucial though is an awareness of individuals within the group. Because we can say the group, the participants, but it doesn’t actually hold together as a group.”

“It’s about really thinking about the needs of the individuals and how you reach them.”

Members of the learning group agreed that the ability to communicate effectively with participants, to understand the background of their participants, and to be genuinely interested in the participants were important skills and attitudes:

“I feel comfortable in bringing people together and making people feel included. I *like* doing that, it makes me feel good.”

“It looks like you are just a natural, and you’re doing it, but you work really hard to create that atmosphere, don’t you? To make people feel at ease, to make people feel comfortable, to talk to you about all sorts of things.”

“There’s never any pressure on anyone to join in, but I definitely think that a lot of the women have responded because of the warm and laidback atmosphere of the group and the fact that, over the past few weeks, we’ve developed rapport with each other.”⁴

Recognising the agenda of the participants and building relationships with them were believed to be particularly important skills when working in participatory settings because participants would only have the confidence to explore creatively once the group felt that they could **trust** each other:

“I think, particularly with the target group that we were working with on the project, if that relationship of trust hadn’t been there obviously the wall hanging wouldn’t have developed, [we] probably couldn’t have worked in that element of choreography and getting the women involved in that, and... then to introduce...[the film makers] into the mix... would have been too far and too much.”

Artists within the learning group believed it was their role to develop rapport and trust within the group, and to use that trust to **draw out the creativity of the participants** and encourage them to have confidence in their own skills. Again, having the **time and space** structured into the project was very important - especially during the early stages of the project - to ensure that participants could develop their confidence and ideas:

“What’s been great about this project is that you haven’t needed to be an expert to get involved. A relief for me, as I was rubbish at textiles in school! An important aspect has been exploring your own creativity and discovering what fabrics, colours and fabrics you’re drawn to, to help your ideas. It sounds ‘airy-fairy’, but over a period of time, really helps!”⁵

⁴ Artist blog May 29 2012

⁵ Artist blog May 20 2012

“... we’ve got a huge variety of technical skills and creativity. Y’ know, ideas and richness, and quantity of work, even, from the different participants, but it’s to make sure that everyone’s got some kind of space within that; where they’re celebrated within that.”

Artists within the learning group believed that the achievements of all the participants should be celebrated; it was believed to be the artists role to help participants develop confidence in their creativity and to **celebrate the achievements** of each individual, regardless of ability:

“It’s not, there’s no, y’ know. It’s not that some people are good at that and some people aren’t. Everybody’s got something; I’ve written that in, that came from the brief: “Everyone is Creative”. And I keep writing that down and I showed them today, everyone is creative, ‘cause I want them to realise that.”

“Even if people don’t have good artistic skills you can notice what they *have* done. You’re giving them confidence. Notice what participants *can* achieve and what they have and mastered for themselves”



In order to give participants the space to explore their creativity, and feel ownership of the project, artists within the learning group wanted to **protect the participants** from the agendas of the other interested parties. It was believed to be particularly important to protect participants if the group was thought to be vulnerable:

“I feel quite protective over the women even before I knew who those women were- the participants- to protect them from all those agendas ‘cause I want their agendas to be the most important in this.”

Due to the wide number of organisations and agendas involved in the Made by Hand project, artists only gradually shared information about the wider objectives of the project rather than tell participants about the whole project at the start. Artists saw themselves as acting like “filters” or “lock-gates”; artists gradually built up the project when they believed participants were in a position to cope with the pressures of the wider project:

⁶ Artist blog May 29 2012

“Filtering, limiting the information to participants to ensure that they are not frightened off.”

“... today I told them about the bigger [project aims]; that’s the third session I’ve had with them, and I told them, y’ know, I felt that they could handle that now but I would have never have gone near it in the beginning! I mean, people go “huuuuh!” [sharp intake of breath].”

In the early stages of the project artists not only wanted to protect the participants from the agendas of other organisations, but also from the other artists in the team; artists who had not previously worked together were commissioned to work on this project which meant that artists were not aware of each other’s participatory approach at the start of the project:

“Even when [the creative team] first met ... I remember you saying ‘I feel protective of these women already’ and I... felt, like, ok, how can I reassure you that I’m not going to have ... [the participants] leaping across the room?!”

“... obviously... [we] had to get to know each other and I had to understand what... [another artist] was about. And it really helped me get confident in other art forms and other ways that people work.”

Artists within the learning group perceived it as their role to **build relationships** with the rest of creative team and find ways of working together. Artists wanted to reassure themselves that the rest of the team shared similar values before introducing them to the participants. Again, building relationships within the creative team was about building **trust** and finding a “shared language”. Finding a “**shared language**” was particularly important when artists were coming from different art forms. Artists involved in this research project viewed this as a learning opportunity and were enthusiastic about how finding a shared language could feed into their own personal practice:

“It’s great for me to think about how you work. I’m sure that will really affect how we then work in our art forms.”

“I’ve been learning a lot about how you deliver a kinda textile project in a participatory setting and how it would link with, y’ know, dance and what kind of skills would cross over.”

Building good working relationships and trust between the artists, as well as the participants, was thought to be one of the key attributes when ensuring that everyone felt valued within the project and thus shared ownership of a participatory project.

Artists within the learning group were aware of the importance of building relationships with participants to ensure they felt valued within the project, however, they were also aware that these **relationships would be temporary** lasted only as long as the lifetime of the project. Artists wanted to ensure that rapport and trust between artists and participants was meaningful, however, it was important that it did not become the main focus of the project for participants. To minimise any feelings of abandonment artists encouraged the fostering of relationships between the lead

organisation and the participants. It was particularly important that a relationship between participants and organisation developed during 'Made by Hand' because Head for Arts was looking to develop further projects within the community and the women who participated in the project:

"When speaking with the Creative Project Manager... she was keen to emphasise that Head for Arts is focused on working long-term with the women, and with all participants, following the end of the project. Whilst everyone involved in the project has their own agenda which last for the extent of the project, Head for Arts has a duty to continuing working with the participants after the project, to build long-term relationships with them. In her words, 'Made by Hand should act as a portal to the rest of what we have to offer'."⁷

"It's forging a link with the local community. It's a legacy."

Artists within the learning group recognised that they were in a pivotal role within the project; they were at the forefront of the project building relationships, balancing the different agendas and ensuring all groups felt valued and recognised.

Feeling proud of the project

"You feel proud of something that you've achieved, and you want other people to see it."

Within the learning group, artists agreed that not only did all parties need to feel valued within the project, but all parties also had to feel proud of what was contributed and what was achieved.

Artists

For artists within the learning group feeling proud of a project, and feeling ownership of the project, translated in to a **good project on a CV**. Artists wanted to showcase their skills, beliefs, and abilities through the work they had done in participatory settings:

"To own that, you're showing on your CV that: I was part of that and it was really good, and I worked with all these different artists and for this organisation."

"I suppose the CV thing is just to say I can do this. I build relationships - in that project I built all those relationships- I did all this work and these are the things I wanna be known for."

As well as being able to showcase their abilities, artists also wanted to feel proud of the art work that was created. The artists within the learning group felt that they had a responsibility to ensure that the work created was of good quality; whilst artists did not act like 'the expert' with participants they did use their professional skills to **bring the project together**:

⁷ Artist blog June 29 2012

“Artists are very much in control of the quality: so there’s involvement in the project from an *early* stage... The artist is happy with the work and proud to tell people about it’ as well.”

For artists to feel a shared ownership of the project, and to feel proud of what was created, it was important that the creative team could imbue the project with some of their own personality and beliefs:

“I kind of felt that the theme of ‘making’ maybe said something about our shared values. And maybe looking at the greening of the valleys maybe said something about our shared values. And the fact that a lot of the participants said that it was relaxing – and that they felt that they could slow down and relax – that really says something about my personal values and what I’d like to come out of the work.”

It is clear that artists had to strike a **subtle balance** to ensure that artists, participants, and organisations each felt ownership and pride in both the process and outcome of a project. Whilst artists felt proud of projects where they were able to share their beliefs and values, they had to be incorporated with the ideas and interests of the participant group.

Participants

Artists within the learning group believed that it was very important for participants to feel proud of both the process they had completed, as well as the final performance/product. Artists believed that **participants should be celebrated** and recognised for their achievements and input; this helped improve the confidence of participants, and enabled participants to feel part of the project:

“‘Cause if you feel recognised - ‘cause you’ve achieved something - you feel proud about it... and that kind of links in with a sense of identity because if you’re proud of something you want to be *identified* with the thing that’s been created.”

As well as recognising the participants’ achievements, artists also believed it was important that the participants were “happy and relaxed”. This is not to say that the process was always easy, but that there was “an element of **trust**”, which was reflected by a relaxed and happy mood, that enabled the participants to explore the creativity and get the most out of the project. An atmosphere of mutual learning and giving was believed to facilitate a feeling of shared ownership and pride in the project, for both participants and artists:

“...they’ve been coming over period of time and...they’re happy to be coming and they’ve invested quite a lot in terms of their creativity and, y’ know, effort already.”

“I definitely learnt skills along the way as well as, I’m sure, the participants did... [there’s] social and personal development.”



Artists felt that it was their role to **facilitate the participants' creativity** as well as trying to help participants surpass their expectations. When working with vulnerable participants artists responded that it was important to recognise these achievements in order to empower participants and increase their confidence. By increasing participant confidence artists hoped that the participants would continue to be creative outside of the project either in their day to day lives, or by seeking out additional creative projects in the future:

"...it's already had an effect with... getting those women on the sewing machine. Y' know, one of the women has actually gone and bought a sewing machine and she's let other women in the group use that sewing machine..."

"They're not throwing their old clothes away- their kids clothes- they're... recycling them and... reusing them."

The sense of developing a lasting legacy and maintaining interest after the project was particularly important for the Made by Hand project as Head for Arts was looking to develop further projects within the community.

Organisations

The creative project manager from Head for Arts felt that successful projects, from the perspective of the organisation, would include a developing relationship between the participant and the organisation. Organisations also felt proud when a successful project had the potential to **inspire further work**, and inspire participants to continue with their creative journey:

"...this particular project is very much a beginning for [Head for Arts] working with this group, and, y' know, the success of the project from my point of view means that they still want to work with us"⁹

Organisations also felt pride in the project when "good art" was created. Organisations wanted the art to be recognised by potential partners and other art organisations; organisations would often be thinking about the next project, or next programme of work, at the same time as running a project

⁸ Artist blog 29/05/2012

⁹ Head for Arts Creative producer

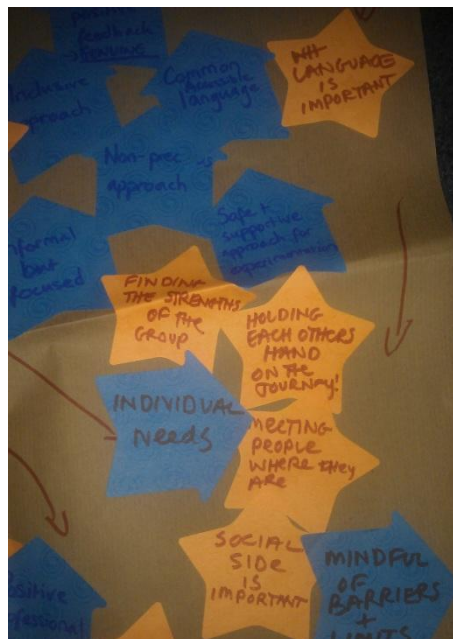
which made **artistic recognition** particularly important when securing future partners and funding. The organisations, as well as the artists, also looked for projects that reflected their values and beliefs and it would therefore be particularly important that organisations and creative teams share these values.

Ensuring that all parties felt proud of the project required all groups to have felt valued and their priorities addressed. Feeling both proud and valued in a project is intrinsically bound with feelings of ownership; all parties want to feel they were involved in something worthwhile, that they could share with their peers. Artists are in a pivotal role within participatory arts projects as they filter and bridge all of those agendas and expectations. Artists within the learning group applied a wide range of skills to build relationships, ensure that ownership was shared, and to facilitate the participants' creativity.

Creating shared ownership.

What skills to artists employ?

Artists employ a wide range of skills to create a sense of shared ownership within a project.



- **Planning and preparation**

Artists within the learning group found it very helpful that they were involved in the planning phase of the project from an early start. The creative team made use of scrapbooks and notebooks to “decipher” the agendas and create possible ideas for the progression of the project.

For the artists involved in the Made by Hand project preparation was also important. This included not only physically preparing for the project, but also mentally preparing for a participatory session. Mental preparation included taking time to think quietly about the project and an upcoming session, undertaking yoga on a weekly basis to help clear the mind

during busy periods, and collecting materials outside of the session time as a way of stimulating reflective practice.

- **Filtering**

Artists believed that part of their role within a project was to act as filters, and to only gradually share with the participants how far-reaching the project was. This enabled the participants to explore their creativity without feeling the pressure or burden of other organisations' agendas.

- **'Tweaking'**

The creative team used their skills as professional artists to "invisibly" bring the project together. This included "tweaking" and tidying some of the textile work, although the creative team agreed that any changes to participants work should be minor and invisible; the work should remain the participants.

- **Common language and accessible approach**

The creative team within the learning group wanted to emphasise the "open door" approach they employed within their participatory practice. To ensure an accessible approach artists listened to participants and used appropriate, similar, language to break down barriers:

"It's to do with talking, being able to talk to anybody in a way that they would be comfortable with. So, using the appropriate words that they would understand. Not baffling someone with a load of science and jargon, y' know. It's like, keeping it easily accessible and understandable through language, through activity."

An accessible approach was also considered within other areas of the project. For example, it was important to consider the costs to participants (if any), and the possibility of providing a crèche in the future, to reduce further barriers wherever possible.



- **Positive and inclusive**

Further personal skills included the way in which artists interacted with participants. Artists worked to create a positive and non-competitive environment where participants could

explore their creativity. The creative team agreed that this was done through a variety of ways:

- Artists need a **sense of humour**. It was important to the artists within the learning group that the sessions were fun, as well as hard work. A sense of humour helped participants relax in to the project.
 - Artists need to be genuinely **interested in working with the participants**. The artists within the learning group agreed that a genuine interest was important when building rapport. It was important that artists remember what participants share in each session, and ask relevant questions. This approach helps individual participants feel valued and important within the project.
 - Artists need to be **friendly but not a friend**. Linked with the interest in working with people, and building rapport, is the artist's ability to be friendly and make conversation to help participants relax in to the project. Artists within the learning group had very strong beliefs that there was a distinction between being friendly and being a friend. Artists built rapport but were not friends with the participants; for example artists did not meet participants outside the project sessions, nor did they 'meet' on social media sites.
 - Artists **use touch where appropriate**. Artists within the learning group agreed that some participants found the use of touch reassuring; for example a touch on the arm could remind the participants that someone was there with them. This was a subtle skill, and artists had to be aware that it was not always appropriate with all participants. Building up experience within participatory arts was thought to be the best way to develop an awareness of the needs of participants.
 - Artists are **not "precious"** about the project or materials. Artists need to remain calm and relaxed even when mistakes are made. Artists within the learning group wanted to give participants permission to "have a go" without hindering their exploration and creativity.
- **Professional attitude, without acting as the expert.**

Artists within the learning group believed it was important to develop a professional attitude when working in participatory settings; this did not mean acting as an expert. A professional attitude included remaining calm and positive, not taking personal problems or stresses in to the room, and being inclusive with participants. As part of remaining professional, artists also had to ensure that participants were not aware of the pressure that artists were under:

"It's a disaster if you ever let anything show that it's a bit wobbly, y' know? ... you're calm, you're in control, you're in charge so everyone can rely on you, so they feel safe."

"[Participants] don't want to see anything other than a positive inspiring person that is fully in control of what's going on."

"You are being professional in that you're approachable and informal, because that is what is needed."

- **Adaptable**

Although artists worked within clear aims and objectives, the creative team agreed that artists need to be able to change plans and adapt. Changes may be needed to suit participant interest and skill, or it may be that the project does not run as planned.

Context specific approaches

The context of the project was very important when artists considered the approach they would use. The methods employed within a school would not be the same as methods employed when working with adults. The Made by Hand project involved working with adult women and it utilised some techniques to maintain participant interest.

To continue participant involvement during a break for the holidays, the textile artist encouraged participants to send in themed postcards during the holidays. As a way to store ideas and to continue exploring their creativity participants were also encouraged to keep notebooks or scrapbooks, which they had decorated. These tools helped maintain participant interest, empower the participant and give participants ownership of their creativity; the aim was that empowerment could be carried in to the actual project sessions and beyond:

“Giving them postcards to send to me over the Easter holidays, or stamped addressed envelopes... so they can keep in touch with me, with little drawings, and squiggles, and doodles, and collages, and things like that; so I know that they’re creating and enjoying it.”

“... making book covers for their journals with textiles, but everybody picks different, and that’s part of the beauty of it. I want those women to start thinking about why they’re attracted to certain fabrics- what colours they like, what patterns they like, what feels they like- and they’ve not necessarily thought about that before.”

During the Made by Hand project artists also attempted not to disrupt routines, even when time was limited. For example, despite filming being delayed the team ensured that participants received a tea break. Not only does this help participants feel in control of the process – and through that ownership of the project – but it often results in increased output; in this case participants voluntarily stayed later to complete filming:

“... when we did the filming... even though it was [only] 2 hours, I still made sure we had a cup of tea break ‘cause that was really important to the ladies.... and then the women stayed an hour and a half longer because we’d created that environment.”

Art form specific skills - dance

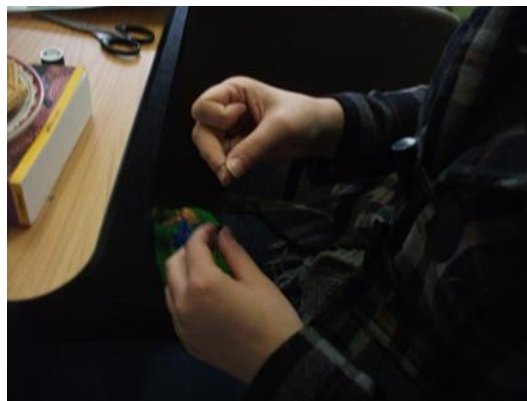
Some approaches that were used to share ownership were developed specifically within the context of dance. During the learning group sessions the dance artist discussed the issue of scaring participants who were new to the art form or who lacked confidence. A conscious decision was made to link dancing to movement that individuals may be familiar with. The dance artist also ensured that participants were given lots of information about the session. Participants were not intimidated by this approach and could feel safe in the environment:

“...it’s just immediately letting them know what’s gonna happen throughout the day and linking it to things that they would have done. So, like, erm, I’d ask if they’d done any dance before and I might ask if they’ve been to a party where there’s been dancing, or, y’ know, linking things like movement in everyday life into it. I think a lot of people find information quite reassuring if they know what’s gonna be expected.”

Art form specific skills - textiles

Some approaches that were used to share ownership were developed specifically within the context of textiles and craft. The textile artist helped participants to build up basic skills on a sewing machine and then encouraged them to pass on these skills to other participants. This method built up confidence in the participants and helped them to feel ownership of their own skills and of the project. This approach was also employed by the textile artist because it reduced the concept of the artist as the ‘expert’; participants were empowered to share skills:

“It’s a way of building them up, and getting them to pass on sort of what they’ve learnt to other people.”



How do artists learn skills?

Artists within the learning group suggested that they had developed their skills by drawing on **life experience** and through learning ‘**on-the-job**’. The artists in the learning group had all undertaken training at undergraduate/postgraduate level. University degrees were valued by the artists because they had enabled the artist to hone their craft and develop their personal practice, however, the artists felt that the courses to have given them sufficient skills to successfully undertake participatory projects:

“You can perhaps go to a workshop or a lecture on this but it can only go so far ‘cause if you’re in a formal environment you almost have to take that and then learn it for yourself or see how somebody else does it.”

Skills training that had taken place within a degree setting was largely focused on performing/selling work with some elements of formal teaching skills. Due to the nature of short modules within a degree any relevant training was considered to be of limited value when employed in ‘live’ participatory arts activities. The artists in the learning group felt that their undergraduate courses

had done little to prepare them for employment, or to consider life after university, and believed that it may be useful to build in “more structured opportunities” to develop experience in participatory settings.

Whilst artists felt that formal courses offered little introduction to participative practice, artists within the learning group had all benefitted from **supportive organisations**. Staff within the organisation had helped artists build up experience within a participative setting, offered advice, provided support, and in some cases offered work in the future. The ‘emerging artist’ also found it extremely helpful to be able to learn by **observation** and **reflection** during the project:

“But I think you do learn from watching other people though don’t you?
I think you learn immensely from being around and sharing best practice
with other people.”

Artists also used supportive individuals, to act as **mentors**, when developing their skills. Mentors were felt to be able to provide advice and support that was based on experience and knowledge of the field. Mentors also offered opportunities for reflection and discussion, as well as guidance.

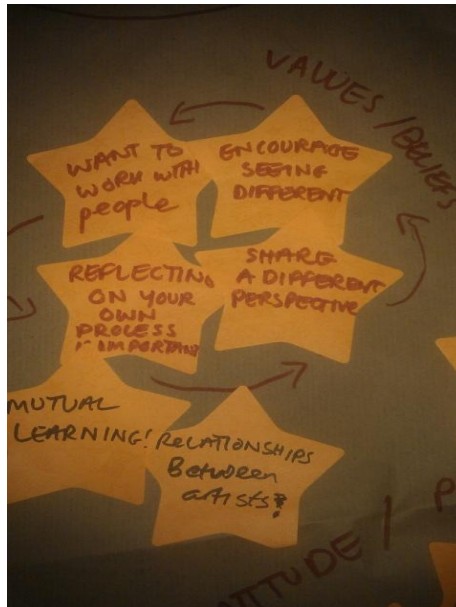
There was some scepticism amongst artists for the need to develop further formal courses, although there was a belief that there was already a wealth of courses available for those looking to develop skills for working in participatory settings. Artists within the learning group suggested that more “informal” methods of learning, where artists could practice their skills, may be more appropriate; this included mentoring and on-the job training. Rather than further formal courses artists within the learning group were more keen to investigate and establish a ‘Code of Conduct’ that would be recognised by employers and artists. It was felt that this would be more valuable because it was the values, beliefs, and attitudes, which were felt to be the key components of good participatory practice:

“... perhaps instead of thinking there needs to be another qualification – when there’s already quite a lot of qualifications out there – maybe there needs to be some sort of, like, charter or manifesto... but it becomes, like, a recognised thing so perhaps artists come and almost align themselves with a set of values and you kind of know you’re on a level pegging. In which case it creates that atmosphere of trust and you know, okay, if someone is aligning themselves to this charter we know they’re gonna work in this way, we know they’re good at doing this, we know they can build relationships, we know they can do quality stuff, we know they can handle all the agendas, but still make it a meaningful thing.”

Shared values and beliefs.

“...to have some sort of vision statement or something so that you can say ‘I totally believe in that, I feel the same, I’m part of your family’.”

Artists within the learning group believed that whilst skills were important, the values and beliefs held by artists and organisations were more important. The key attitudes and beliefs focused on the



importance of believing that everyone is creative, ensuring that all participants are welcome, and a genuine interest in working with people. The artists within the learning group believed that these beliefs and attitudes could be honed and developed, but not taught, which led to the suggestion of developing a sector-wide recognised Code of Conduct.

Artists wanted to work with organisations that shared their values, so that organisations, artists, and participants could share ownership of a project.

Other issues

During the learning group sessions artists raised other issues that they had encountered throughout their careers as artists working in participatory settings.

- **There are barriers between artists who primarily focus on their personal performance practice and those who work in participatory settings.** Artists within the learning group wanted to break down the barriers between the “different camps”; artists felt that there was hostility between artists who primarily work in participatory settings and artists who primarily focus on their personal practice. Artists within the learning group explained that they worked with a wide variety of employers, and in different places, and they did not want to be “labelled [as] one thing”:

“It’s been an odd experience; meaning that sometimes being in the middle, and hearing from these different camps, and me just trying to break it down and see it all the same... [and] find the common ground... I don’t find the barriers useful.”

- **Artists found it helpful having all the project details when developing a project.** The creative team appreciated being given logistical, technical, and other details from the lead organisation. By receiving all the information, artists were able to decide for themselves what was relevant and how it would impact on their project delivery:

“I think when working in this way, having all the information is essential, even if it’s things that people don’t think is important because it’s all connected.”

“It’s that hard thing of things you assume, and things you don’t assume, and things that people would think is important for you or not important for you to know.”

- **Artists recognised the need for funders to collate information about participants, but were concerned about their focus.** The information funders regularly collate focuses on the number of participants reached, rather than the quality of the participants’ experience. Artists within the learning group believed that this approach favoured large scale “entertainment” projects rather than in-depth participatory projects:

“... you gotta... prove, that you reached so many people. Why can’t you say that we reached 12, or 8, but we did this, and this... [The] whole thing about this is... quality not quantity.”

“... there’s a place for these big, spectacles... it’s gonna raise an interest... and... it will be exciting, entertaining... But, I guess, it’s just such a different experience to what these women are getting, and it’s kind of reacting to what these women, maybe, need... If there was 30 or 40 [participants] in a room, maybe they wouldn’t be doing the same kind of thing.”

Conclusions

Artists are in a pivotal position when delivering work as they bridge the gap between organisations and participants. The creative team for the Made by Hand project believed that everyone involved in the project needed to feel valued and important in order to share ownership of a project; this meant addressing the different agendas of the organisations involved by finding common ground and areas of flexibility. In order to address the different agendas artists found it useful to be involved in the planning of a project at an early stage, to receive logistical details on the project, and to engage in face-to-face discussions with the organisations involved.

As well as balancing the different agendas of the organisations involved artists also had to ensure that participants felt ownership of the project. Artists wanted to protect the participants from the wider agendas and pressures to ensure that they had the time and space to explore and develop their creativity. The participants were viewed as the most important people involved in the participatory project and artists worked hard to build trust and foster relationships with them.

As well as building relationships artists in the learning group employed a wide range of values, skills, and approaches to develop a shared ownership with participants. These included the belief that everyone is creative; an ability to adapt; a positive and professional approach; and a genuine interest in working with people. Artists developed their skills in an ad hoc and often informal manner. Mentors, supportive organisations, and observations, were seen as particularly helpful for developing the appropriate skills. Artists working in participatory settings would like their skills and

values to be recognised by employers and funders; however, the usefulness of formal training is viewed with some scepticism.

Artists who took part in the learning group agreed that 'ownership' of participatory arts projects was complex and subtle; it was essential that all groups and individuals felt included and heard in order to develop a sense of shared ownership.

Appendix 1: ArtWorks Cymru – Guidance for Bloggers

We are asking an early career artist involved in each project to undertake a blog for ArtWorks Cymru. The objectives for these blogs are as follows:

- We would like you to use the blog as a space to reflect on the practice of the team you are working in and the process that is unfolding
- It would be great if posts could reflect the Learning Group subject matter and extend the debate a little
- The blogs could also help us to consider how practice varies in different contexts and across different artforms

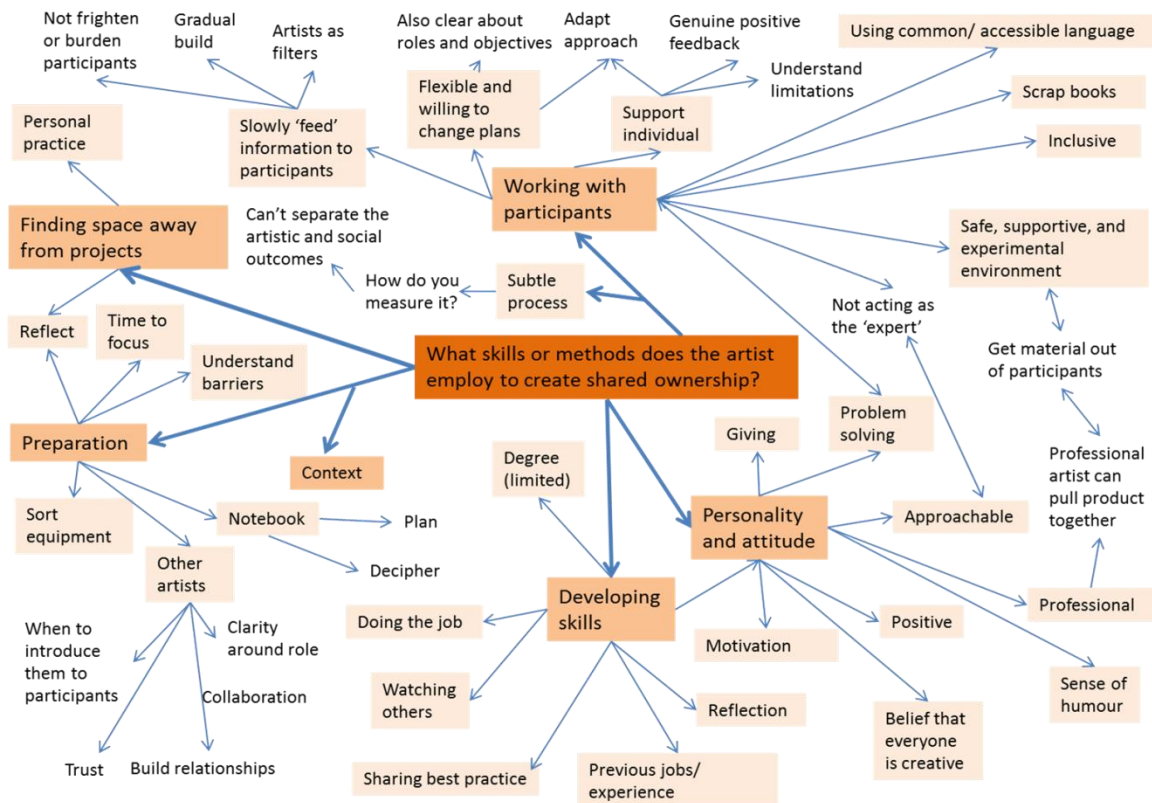
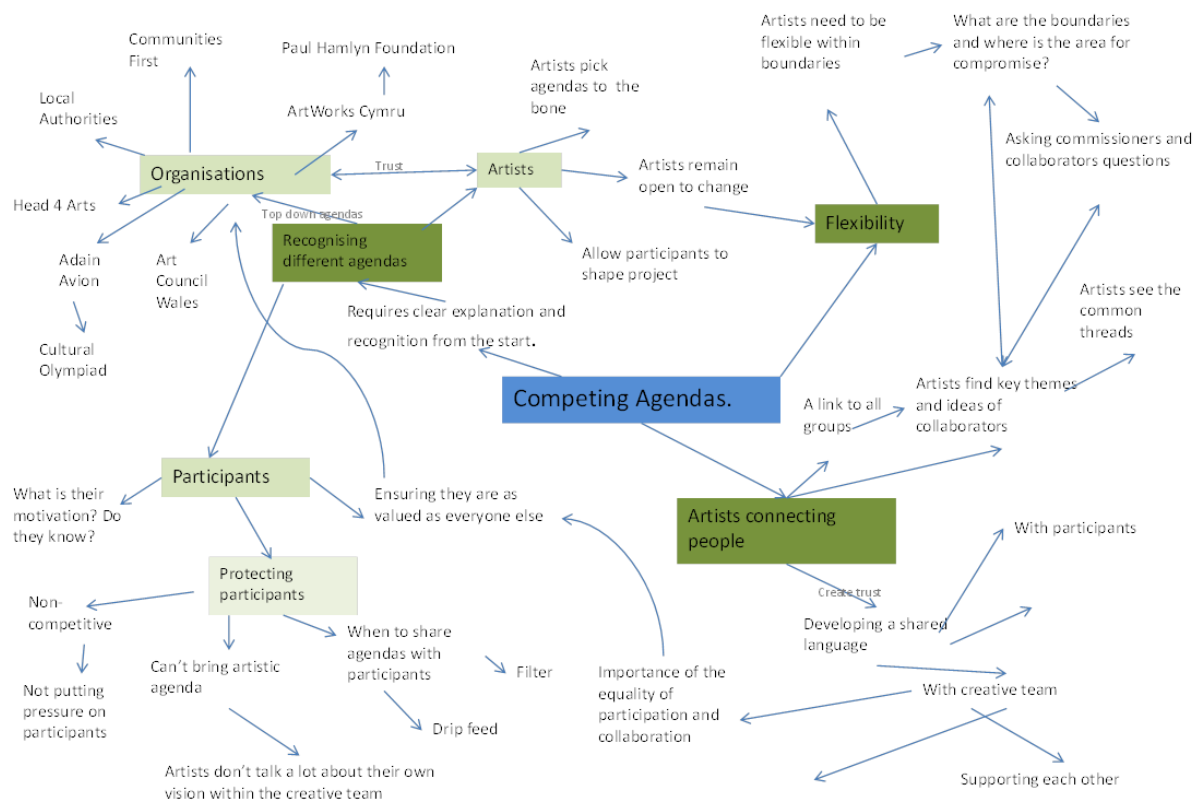
Here is some best practice tips to keep in mind as you blog for us:

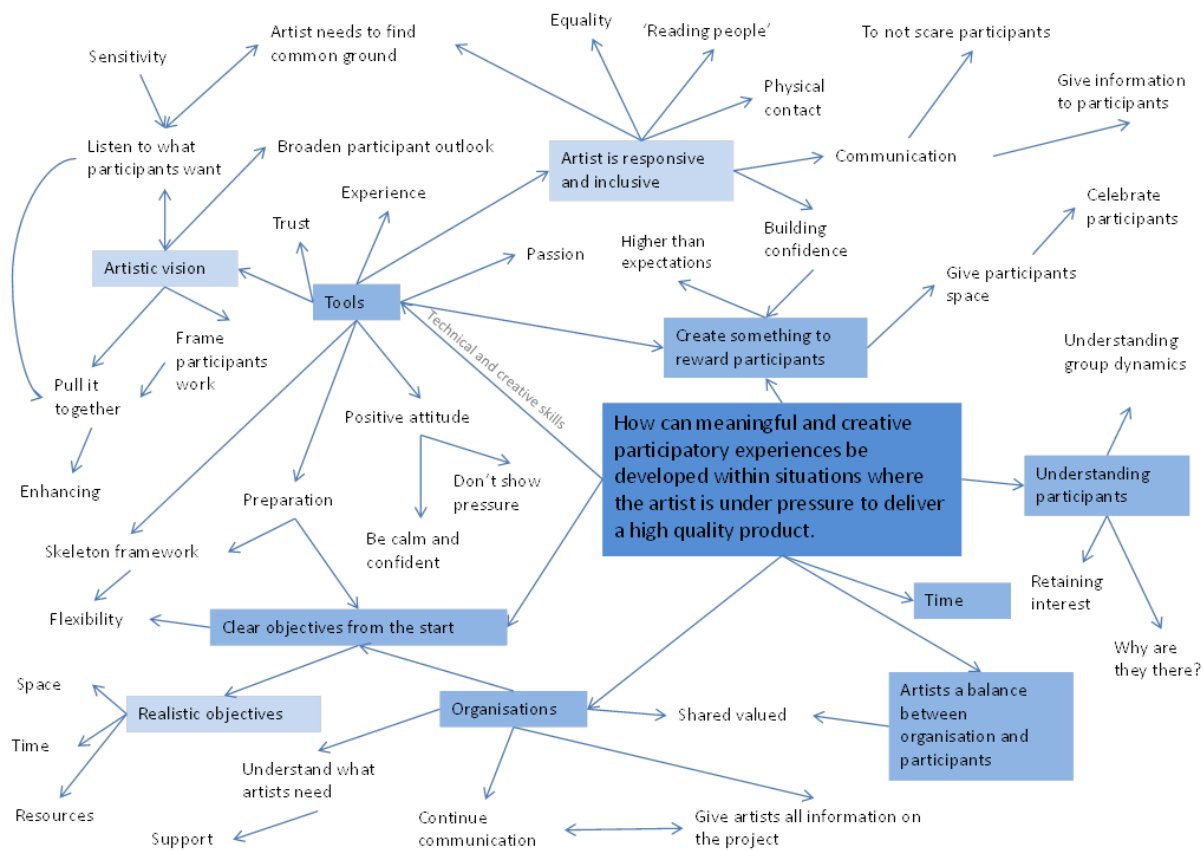
- Regular posts will help to give an insight into the project – ideally we would like you to post after every session
- Posts don't have to be long – a paragraph is fine and easier for people to read
- Images or link to webpages are great and really help to give people an insight into what you are thinking – in fact, you could even do a video diary and post that if you prefer!
- Check through your entry before you post it – make sure it's what you really want to say and makes sense! Check the spelling and grammar.
- The blog will be linked to our ArtWorks Cymru facebook page and will be made public. You will be named as the blogger, so please only make comments that you are happy to be made public
- Please do not use the real names or any distinguishing features of participants – if you want to comment on something someone said or did, be generic about who they are and what they did. When referring to artists, please only use first names.
- If you use quotes or images, please make sure that you credit them or attribute them to the source they came from

Gavin Porter, ArtWorks Cymru Digital Project Assistant, will be meeting with each blogger as they begin and getting them set up. And he is always available for technical help and advice!

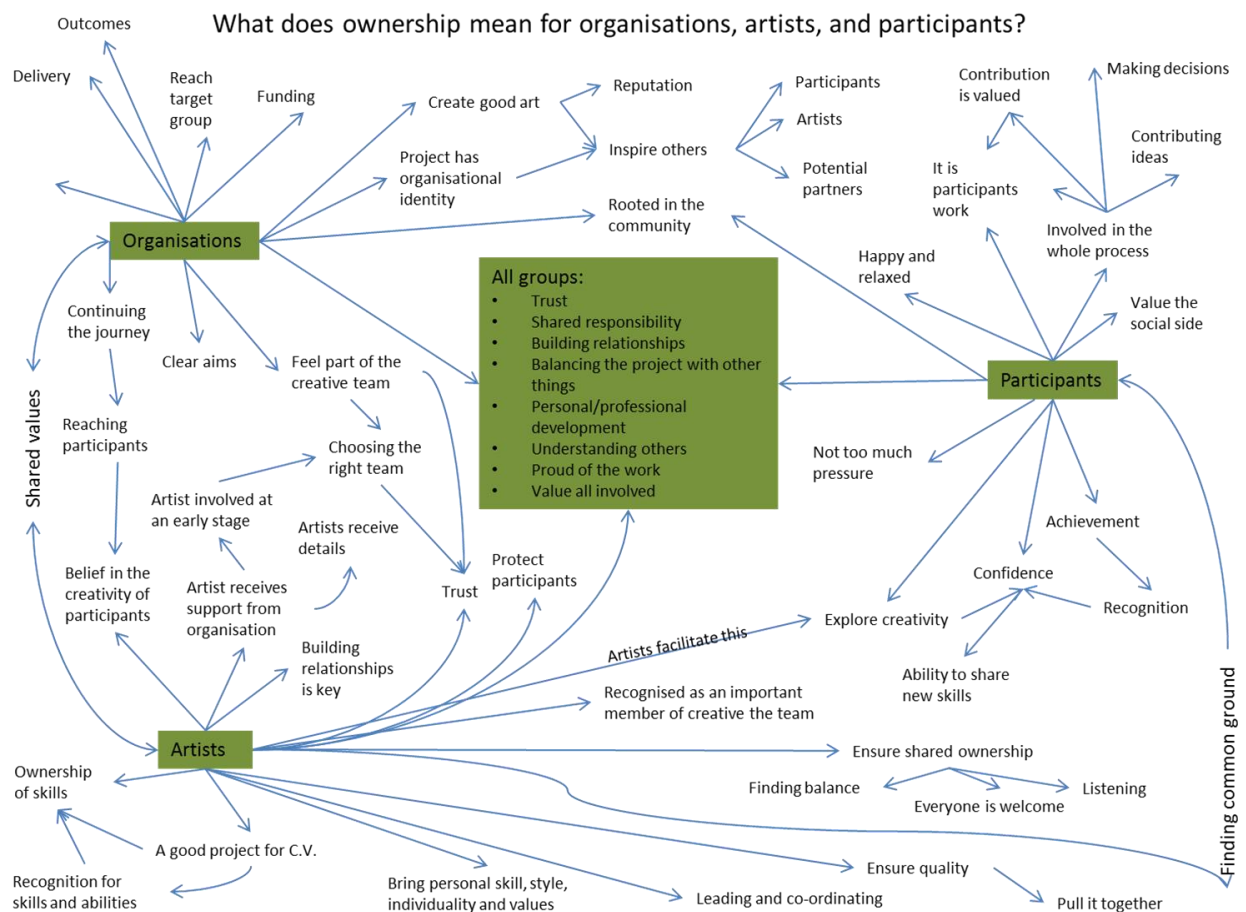
You can also contact project lead, Rhian Hutchings, if you have any concerns about the process or questions about the content of your blogs.

Appendix 2: Mind Maps created from Learning Group Sessions





What does ownership mean for organisations, artists, and participants?



Appendix 3: Head for Arts project aims and outcomes.

Project Aims

- To engage participants in the local area in a high profile project: in particular craft groups, women who are economically inactive, experienced patchwork quilters and people who are interested in being involved in mixed media projects.
- To provide a positive opportunity that focuses on sharing skills, introduction and engagement in new art forms and an opportunity to individually contribute to a large-scale project that will be exhibited within the community.
- To demonstrate that engagement in this project has made a difference to the participants (e.g. in development of transferable skills, improved motivation, or interest in the arts).
- To provide a training opportunity for a newly qualified practitioner specialising in one or more of the art forms involved, working alongside a team of more experienced community artists.
- To create a high quality installation for Adain Avion, combining film, live performance and original score.
- To explore “quality in participatory arts practice” as part of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. In particular:
 - To use Adain Avion project as the framework for exploring how opportunities for meaningful and creative participatory experiences can be developed within situations where the artist is under pressure to deliver a high quality “product”
 - To examine how artists new to participatory practice can develop their skills through creative collaborations with more experienced community arts practitioners.
 - To explore how ownership can be shared with participants without the artists losing their own identity in the process.

Project Outcomes

- The creation of a patchwork quilt made from sections contributed by a number of different participants from the local area (to be retained on display in the area as a legacy from the Cultural Olympiad project).
- The creation of a non-narrative film, based on the participants’ movements, stories and experiences.
- The presentation of the film in the Adain Avion plane alongside a live performance.
- The creation of an original score to accompany the installation, inspired by the experience of the creation of the quilt, by the participants and the choreography.
- The creation of a training opportunity for a newly qualified artist to gain more experience in working in community arts.

- The provision of a memorable collaborative experience for participants, artists and audience alike.
- A record of the “journey travelled” by the participants, measuring their personal development and the impact of the project.
- An evaluation of the project via the ArtWorks Cymru consortium
- The creation of a new sustainable craft group in the area (or its integration into an existing group with an expanded membership).