Becoming Other: Social and Emotional Development through the Creative Arts for Young People with Behavioural Difficulties.

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Abstract

This article focuses on the effects of an arts based intervention for young people deemed at risk of school exclusion because of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Using a range of qualitative methods, including observations and interviews, the study explored from the perspective of eleven young people (aged 11-16) the potential for creative arts interventions to transform young people's difficult social situations of development and, in so doing, effect changes in behaviour and way of being. The findings suggest that the interventions that the arts organisation offered these young people provided alternatives to their personal, cultural and historical ways of experiencing the world. In 'becoming other' as an artist, experimenting with different art media and trying out creative ideas within a safe environment, the young people chose to try out becoming a different version of themselves. This process of adopting a new identity in becoming an artist enabled some young people to recontextualise their relationship with the social worlds around them. The introduction of an element of socialised play through creative arts interventions helped these young people to negotiate the crisis of a social situation of development. These findings suggest that imagination, invoked through the social situation of play, can help disengaged young people to change their perceptions about the imagined worlds of the future.

Introduction

Young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) often struggle within the performative expectations and cultures of traditional schooling, leaving them at risk of marginalisation and/or social exclusion with long-term negative future consequences for their social engagement in the wider world (e.g. Duckworth and Schoon 2012; Lumby 2013). Success in both academic and emotional terms in secondary school requires self-regulation, emotional resilience, and the ability to collaborate with both peers and adults (e.g. Claxton 2007; Regan and Martin 2013; Zimmerman 2008). However, the academic demands of the school curriculum allows little time and resources for the development of these psychological and emotional skills or tools.

Research has shown that evidence based academic interventions can be effective for some young people in certain circumstances (e.g. Hoagwood et al. 2007; Lane, Wehby and Barton-Arwood 2005; Maggin, Wehby and Gilmour 2016). Martin, Anderson and Adams (2012) argue that arts participation is a potentially important foundation for well-rounded adolescent development. School interventions therefore are often focussed on the integration of the child into the formal structures of schooling (e.g. literacy, numeracy, or other specific academic skills). However, there is also research evidence that adolescence is a critical and complex period in cognitive and emotional development (e.g. Nicholls 2000; Steinberg 2005). Adolescents who are struggling to develop both the empathy needed for collaboration and their own emotional needs, as well as the understanding of the criteria for academic success, can often experience periods of intense turbulence and, at times, crisis. The danger is that the remedy offered to young people with SEBD is often more of what failed them in the first place without attending to the emotional and affective factors involved in school interactions.

There is a growing recognition that emotion and imagination are central aspects in the development of young people's ability to self-regulate, empathise with others, and work collaboratively (e.g. Fleer and Hammer 2013; Hughes and Wilson 2004). Other research has highlighted the need for strong peer relationships and the ability to collaborate within social environments (e.g. Lynch, Lerner and Leventhal 2013; Moran and John-Steiner, 2004). The creative arts can offer some young people who are at very

high risk of becoming disaffected a powerful set of tools for creating imaginary contexts that may provide them with the opportunity to re-negotiate identities and hence re-engage with school (Daniels and Downes, 2014; Wallace-DiGarbo and Hill, 2006). Through 'becoming other', in their new role as a creative artist, the young people may work in collaboration with peers and adults to free themselves from the fear of failure and the constraints of their current interactions with the social world (Wright and Rasmussen, 2001). Cooper (1993) describes this as a process of 'resignification' which 'involves the development of new and positive identities as a consequence of relationships and experiences which undermine the pupil's original negative view of self, by revealing evidence of desirable, positive qualities' (139). Hughes and Wilson (2004) talk of the development of 'a more reflexive self' (68) through adopting a specific role within social interaction. In this way young people may develop the 'ability to play a social role – understand and perform to expectations of others, as well as develop and sustain personal style and identity' (ibid.). As Cooper (1993) argues, this allows the young people to take risks within a supportive but challenging environment 'in the knowledge that they will be accepted and valued by others, even if they fail' (138).

Much previous research has focused on the effectiveness of drama-based interventions in re-engaging disaffected young people with schooling. However, there is a growing interest in the potential impacts of the creative arts more broadly (including photography, music production and drawing). As yet, there is little research on the experience of the young people involved in these programmes. This article focuses on the effects of an arts based intervention for young people deemed at risk of school exclusion because of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties through the experience of the young people concerned. In so doing, it explores the potential for creative arts activities to mediate the school experience of young people with SEBD. This article is based on data collected from a larger project, entitled *Being Other: The Effectiveness of Arts Based Approaches in Engaging with Disaffected Young People* (Tawell et al. 2015). The *Being Other* project examined the effectiveness of five different creative arts and theatre programmes delivered by two arts based organisations. The interventions were designed to provide alternatives and supplements to mainstream education for young people who were at risk of becoming disengaged or excluded from school and/or society. The project found that for some young people arts based programmes provided opportunities for reflection and personal transformation. In this article, we use data collected from one of the art programmes, *Fresh Art*, to focus on the process of social and emotional development as the young people involved moved from a situation of crisis to potential social re-engagement with schooling.

Theoretical Perspective: Negotiating Adolescent Crisis

As the discussion of the literature in this section of the paper shows, adolescents with behavioural difficulties are often described as experiencing a crisis of identity. The adolescents that we were concerned with in this study faced significant difficulties negotiating social interactions with adults and peers and consequently were each at a critical point in the development of their identities. Erikson's (e.g. 1968) theory of psycho social stages of crisis has been particularly influential in analyses of crises in psychological development particularly in identity formation in adolescence. Holland and Lachicotte (2007) point out that Erikson viewed identity formation as individuals' attempts to answer the overarching question of who they are and what is their place in society. Researchers influenced by Erikson tend to focus on the psychological well-being of individuals rather than on the ways that identities are constructed in interaction with others. However, researchers in the sociocultural tradition (e.g. Penuel and Wertsch 1995; Holland et al. 1998) point to the fundamental role of mediation for the study of identity formation. As the research focus in this article is on the social and emotional

development of young people with SEBD through creative arts based projects, a sociocultural theoretical approach had been adopted.

The term 'adolescent crisis' used in this article refers to Vygotsky's (1998) concept of the social situation of development characterised by changes in personality and consciousness of the social world at particular ages: ‘critical periods when they begin to walk and talk, when they start to use conceptual thinking, and when they gain self-awareness during adolescence’ (Mahn 2003, 120). Karabanova (2010) points out that Vygotsky identified emotional experience, or the young person’s affective relationship to their environment, as the key unit of analysis for an understanding of this development. Vygotsky (1993) argued that development involves periods of crisis, or critical periods, as the learner encounters contradictions between their own psychological development and the demands of the learning situation. When there is a clash between the personal and social (the crisis point) the young person, through interaction with others, can begin to envisage things in a new way. However, these social situations of development can lead to considerable frustration for the young person as well as a ‘drop in the rate of success, a slacking of interest in school work, and a general decline in capacity for work’ (Vygotsky 1998, 191). At adolescence, this frustration can also lead to clashes with the authority and views of parenting or schooling as the young person develops a more critical understanding of previously accepted cultural and social norms.

Vygotsky (1998) argued that in moments of crisis within a particular social situation of development ‘the child can become relatively difficult due to the fact that... the pedagogical system applied to the child does not keep up with the rapid changes in their personality (193-194).' These moments of crisis are both personal to the particular need and history of each young person but also socially experienced and mediated by interaction with others. Moreover, the key to development lies in the ability of an individual to perceive the limitations of the situation they are in and to imagine a different identity for themselves (Holland et al. 1998). Greenhalgh (2012) argues that young people with emotional difficulties may lack this ability as their imagination has become ‘stuck and fixed’ (107). Bozhovich (2009) describes from her research on failing school children how many had developed a negative affective relationship toward learning and school that determined aspects of their personality and behaviour in school. These traits included: an aversion to learning; indifference; or a lack of confidence and a fear of failure. In her studies of young people with SEBD, Bozhovich (2009) found that in conditions where their social and emotional needs were not met, the young people suffered developmental delays. Engeström (2009), from the perspective of activity theory, argues that analysing emotional experiences can be a means of understanding ‘object-related motives that are difficult to access and explicate consciously’ (308). This is particularly true of young people with SEBD. Bozhovich argues that what ‘underlies complex and diverse emotional experiences—internally conflicting or ambivalent emotions—is a complex structure of diverse needs and impulses, diverse motivational tendencies’ (Bozhovich, 2009, 71).

Yaroshevsky (1989) points out that Vygotsky perceived imagination, cognition and emotion as being closely interrelated. Vygotsky (1991) argued that 'imagination in adolescence is, from the developmental point of view, the successor of children’s play’ (77). Imagination, invoked through the social situation of play and mediated through interaction with others, can help a young person to change their perceptions about the imagined worlds of the future. As Smagorinsky argues, Vygotsky’s ‘relation of imagination, emotion, and cognition suggests that people’s capacity to project a trajectory for themselves is culturally mediated. It is important to understand, then, the kinds of mediation that provide both the emotional foundation and cultural sense of propriety for their trajectories, and the sorts of mediation that potentially limit conceptions of trajectory’ (Smagorinsky 2011, 339). The challenge for

educators is to find ways to reinvigorate the imaginations of young people that are essential for their social, emotional and cognitive development.

The argument put forward in this article is that some young people with SEBD are unable to transform their social situation within their school environment because of the conflict between their complex needs and performativity demands on schools. These unresolved crises can have damaging developmental consequences for those young people who remain 'difficult'. The hypothesis posed here is that introducing a mediating element of socialised play into young people's learning through creative arts interventions can help these young people to negotiate the crisis of a social situation of development by 'becoming other'. Drawing on the work of Vygotsky, Holzman (2009) argues that, 'children *become*… through their joint performances as other than who they are (speakers, artists, readers, caregivers and so on)' (113).

The research question then asked in this study was:

Can a creative arts programme transform young people's social situations of development and, in so doing, effect changes in behaviour and way of being?

Social and Emotional Development through Arts based Activities

Wright and Rasmussen argue that arts based activities can in certain circumstances transform the social interaction of young people with behavioural difficulties through 'dramatic knowing' (2001, 218). Much of the evidence for the potential of creative arts to create possibilities for a realignment of identity through social interaction comes from the impact of drama interventions (Cahill 2010; Daniels and Downes 2015). Daykin et al. (2008), in a systematic review of the literature on the impact of participation in performing arts on adolescent health and behaviour, highlighted the positive impact of drama on social skills and peer interaction. Bungay and Vela-Burrows (2013) subsequently found evidence, albeit weak, that arts based strategies raised pupils' awareness of health issues. A literature review by Joronen, Rankin and Astedt-Kurki (2008) also found positive effects from several studies of drama programmes on children and adolescent health. Catterall, Chapleau and Iwanga (1996) found that sustained involvement in theatre projects was associated with pupil gains in: reading proficiency; self-concept and motivation; and increased empathy and tolerance of others. Catterall (2007), in an experimental study on enhancing peer conflict resolution skills through drama, reported gains in student attitudes about acting, metacognition, problem resolution skills and self-efficacy, plus a small but statistically significant gain for students' perceived ability to work effectively in groups.

Positive results relating to social engagement and identity for young people have also been reported in qualitative studies in the creative fields of: art (Wallace-Digarbo and Hill 2006); collaborative dance (Rouhiainen and Hamaliainen 2013); digital storytelling (Murakami 2008); singing (Hampshire and Matthijsse 2010); mask-making (Zoss, Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen 2007); collaborative writing (Thompson and Wittek 2016) and film-making (McCluskey, Lloyd and Stead 2010). A common theme of this research is the opportunity for young people to explore and experiment through a creative medium. Wallace DiGarbo and Hill (2011), in a small case study of an art therapy approach involving at risk youth, found the greatest positive benefits in terms of attitude and behaviour for those most at risk. Karkou and Glasman (2004) and Hampshire and Matthijsse (2010) have reported positive effects of arts based projects on young people's emotional wellbeing. Other research into attempts to modify the behaviour of pupils at risk of exclusion also emphasise the importance of social interaction (e.g. Burton 2007; Kinder and Harland, 2004) and the fostering of resilience for reintegration into

mainstream schooling (Pillay, Dunbar-Krige and Mostert 2013). Hughes and Wilson (2004) and Tawell et al. (2015) indicate that social and emotional development requires time, opportunities, challenge and appropriate support. Risk-taking and experimentation through imaginative activity emerge as key findings from other research into social and emotional development (e.g. Brice Heath and Soep 1998; Harland et al. 2000). Yet as Daykin (2007) reminds us, much of the evidence linking arts based activity with social inclusion, health and wellbeing is inconclusive, largely because of a focus on outcomes rather than process. This is particularly true for studies of interventions of at risk young people where measures of effectiveness tend to look at school attendance and examination performance data. There is a need for research to look closely at the processes through which young people with SEBD renegotiate their identities within social interaction.

Methodology

Qualitative methodologies allow researchers to explore subjective meanings and experiences through open questioning and the generation of in-depth data. Qualitative methods were thus deemed appropriate for this research, as they positioned the young people 'as social actors who are subjects, rather than objects of inquiry' (Christensen and James 2008, 1) and recognised the voice of the young people as having '"due weight" in matters which concern them' (Heal 2015, 264). Giving the young people a voice was particularly important in this research, due to the young people often feeling as though their voices had been subjugated in other contexts, for example, not being listened to in school. Additionally, this methodology complimented the *Fresh Art* aim of helping disengaged learners feel ownership over their own education and lives. The research team considered a mixed methods methodology, whereby questionnaires would have been used to gain a more standardised and quantifiable measure of change (e.g. in behaviour etc.). However, the group leaders advised the team that the young people attending *Fresh Art* were unlikely to engage in filling in a questionnaire due to being asked to complete questionnaire assessments in other settings, e.g. in schools and with social workers. The full data set includes interviews (group, individual and task-based) with the young people and the group leaders, observations of sessions, and feedback activities with the young people, parents/guardians, teachers and social workers (e.g. posters with questions on were displayed in the exhibition space, for attendees to answer, such as: 'Parents/guardians – what has your child got out of coming to Fresh Art?'). The focus of this article is to provide an analysis from the perspectives of the young people. The findings are drawn from the interviews with the young people and the field notes.

Methods

Background

Fresh Art was a 12 week creative flexi-school programme, designed to re-engage young people in education. The programme aimed to: 1) help disengaged learners feel ownership of their own education; 2) encourage peer-to-peer learning; 3) improve the confidence and self-esteem of the participants; 4) improve attendance and attainment of school refusers; and 5) reduce exclusions from school. The programme ran from January to May 2015, with two separate groups in different urban locations in a county in southern England. Both groups were facilitated by one Lead Artist Educator and two Young Leaders. The leaders were different for each group, although the Lead Artist Educator for Group Two also took over the role of Lead Artist Educator for Group One for a couple of weeks. Guest artists were occasionally invited to run workshops, based on the interests of the young people. Additionally, two members of the arts charity management team often attended. The young people involved were aged between 11-16 years (7 boys and 10 girls). Group One began with 11 participants; however, during the intervention, one young person withdrew due to moving schools. Group Two started with two

participants. This number gradually increased, during the intervention, to seven regular attendees. The majority of the young people were referred to the intervention by their schools although the reasons were not always clear, as some of the referral forms from schools had very limited information. Reasons given for referral included: social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD); disengagement from school (e.g. poor attendance/truancy); and/or being at-risk of permanent school exclusion. Many of the young people had histories of multiple fixed term exclusions. At least six of the group had involvement with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and three with youth offending teams or the police. At least eight of the group were in contact with social services. Three of the young people were Looked After Children (LAC) and eight of the 12 had school Special Educational Needs (SEN) support. One student had a full Statement of special educational need. Two electively home educated young people also attended the programme.

Overview of the programme structure

Fresh Art began with a two-day creative residency, where participants were introduced to the aims of the project and given the opportunity to experiment with different art techniques. The group leaders worked intensively with the young people to identify their particular learning styles, interests and talents. Sessions were then conducted once per week during the school day and lasted for five hours. Sessions involved a combination of group activities, tutorials in art styles and methods (including printing, graffiti and photography), working on individual projects with the group leaders and artists (for example, creating a film, writing and producing a song, building models and drawing), and attending outings to arts and cultural events/exhibitions. An exhibition was held at the end of the programme to celebrate the achievements of the young people. The exhibition was attended by the participants, *Fresh Art* leaders, guest artists, parents/guardians, teachers, social workers and supporters of the arts charity.

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC). The research team also followed the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2011). Informed written consent was gained from the young people, their parents/guardians and the group leaders. The parents of all 17 young people were sent information letters and consent forms. Fifteen out of 17 parents/guardians gave consent for their child to participate in the study. The researchers informed the young people about choice, consent and confidentiality at the start of each interview. To ensure that all collected data remained confidential, it was securely stored on encrypted memory sticks, which could only be accessed by research team members. Research participant names, and the name of the arts programme, have been replaced with pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity.

Sample

Data from 11 of the 15 young people were included in the analysis for this paper (5 boys and 6 girls). The two electively home educated young people were removed from the sample, due to: 1) falling outside of the programme's target group; and 2) not exhibiting SEBD. One young person opted-out of the interview, so was taken out of the sample, and the young person who withdrew from the programme was also removed. Thus a purposive sample was drawn from the programme population. It is important to note, that this sample attrition may have biased the findings of the study.

Observations

The data collection process began with fieldworkers attending *Fresh Art* sessions. The fieldworkers observed and joined in with activities, both participating in group tasks and providing one-to-one help to the young people when asked to by the participants or group leaders.

Taking part in the activities and working directly with the young people enabled the fieldworkers to develop a strong rapport with the participants. The young people engaged in conversations with the fieldworkers, sharing their thoughts, feelings, attitudes and reflections on their involvement in *Fresh Art* and their retrospective accounts of school. Handwritten field notes were recorded, including short verbatim conversations, and typed up after the sessions.

Interviews

The interview techniques used with the young people somewhat differed between Group One and Group Two. All interviews were conducted towards the end of the programme. A nominal group technique (NGT) (Chapple and Murphy 1996) was originally adopted with Group One. This technique was chosen as it is designed to enable participants to contribute equally and 'generate, discuss and prioritise items' (MacPhail 2001, 168). By ensuring that group discussions are not dominated by only a few individuals, the technique aims to improve the concomitant accuracy of the data. However, unfortunately in this research, only three participants agreed to participate in the group (NGT) interview and the interview had to be conducted in the same room as the other *Fresh Art* participants. As a result, very little information was gained, although this reticence in itself suggests either a lack of confidence or trust in the social arena of group talk. The following week, after the group interview, one of the fieldworkers spoke to a young person who had opted not to participate, but had been present in the room during the group interview. She said that she had not wanted to participate in the group interview, due to it being *"awkward"*, but said that she would be happy to have an individual interview with the fieldworker. This conversation influenced the adoption of a different interviewing technique. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with all of the young people in Group One, bar one who opted-out. The topic guides for the individual interviews were developed using Tomlinson's (1989) work on hierarchical focusing and were informed by research team meetings in which emergent themes from the field notes were discussed.

In contrast, the first interview to take place with Group Two was an impromptu group interview carried out by the group leaders. This was not part of the research design; however, the information was used, alongside that collected in the field notes to adapt the individual topic guides. Individual semi-structured interviews were then conducted with all of the young people in Group Two. A further group interview was then conducted by the group leaders. The data collected from all of the interviews conducted with Group One and Group Two were then coded for general themes. These themes were used to devise a final topic guide, which was used to conduct a group interview with participants from Group Two. The topic guide included statements such as: **Some people have said that being able to explore, experiment and try new things has been important for them. What do you think about that?** An iterative process was therefore adopted, in which data was collected and coded in a cyclical pattern. The coding of original data from fieldwork notes informed the collection of further data to consolidate or disconfirm the findings. Regular team meetings were also held throughout all phases of the data collection and analysis to discuss and refine emerging themes. It must be noted, however, that the final group interview involved just two of the young people, and this must be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions from the data. Additionally, due to time restraints, we were unable to conduct a final group interview with Group One which is a limitation of the research.

Drawing exercise

A drawing exercise was also integrated into the individual interviews with the young people from both groups. Five of the 11 young people who were interviewed participated in the drawing exercise (all were interviewed by the same interviewer), three opted not to do the task and three were not asked to do it due to a new fieldworker conducting their interviews. The exercise involved the interviewer asking the young people to draw three pictures representing: how they felt before attending *Fresh Art*; how they felt during *Fresh Art;* and how they felt about going back to school. The young people were free to interpret and visualise the three time points in any way they wanted. As the researchers were evaluating an arts-based intervention, this arts-based method enabled the young people to communicate through a medium which they had become used to and enjoyed using. As Dytham and Rowell (2015) note, drawings have a 'propensity to enable participant's to create and then reflect, thus enabling [researchers] to gain an insight into the ways in which individuals present themselves, understand their own biography and connect to the wider social world' (280). 'From a socio-cultural standpoint, drawing is seen as a symbolic tool and a powerful means of communication' (Hall 2015:141). The drawings provided a visual timeline, which the young people used as a stimulus during the interviews to explore changes in themselves and their feelings toward school.

Location

All of the interviews with the young people were conducted at the host centres. The majority of the interviews with the young people took place in a quiet room or corridor away from the main art studio. However, on occasion they took place in the main room at the participant's workspace.

Reflexivity and Limitations

Attending and participating in the *Fresh Art* sessions allowed the fieldworkers to build good relationships with the young people. However, by providing assistance in the sessions, the role of the fieldworkers may have been blurred. Consequently, 'interviewer bias' and 'social desirability bias' (Bryman 2008, 201/699) may have the impacted the validity of the findings.

The methods adopted in this research were used to try to disrupt and equalise the 'power imbalances' (Heal 2015, 272) between the adult researchers and young people, by providing 'choice, ownership and familiarity' (Heal 2015, 264). The young people were involved in shaping the methodology, for example, based on feedback from the young people, individual rather than group interviews were conducted. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the drawing exercise provided a familiar medium or symbolic tool through which the young people were able to communicate. It also allowed the young people, who chose to participate, time to reflect on their experiences and any changes in their behaviour or perspectives. They were also able to consider their future trajectories. The method in effect further tested, and added weight to the argument that the arts were able to help these young people to reflect on themselves. The process of drawing was therefore just as important as the end product in understanding the young people's individual accounts. For example one young person looked up a picture of on their phone to draw whist another added to the picture when talking about it with the researcher. There was little talk during the drawing but the drawing acted as a prompt for discussion after. By talking through the drawings with the young people, the researcher positioned themselves as a co-constructor of inter-subjective meanings, with the young person leading them through their journey. Thus, the young people were active participants in the research, who were able to build their answers in stages (Heal 2015) and 'negotiate their own level of participation' (Angell,

Alexander and Hunt 2014, 26). However, as only five participants participated in the drawing exercise, this should be considered as a pilot and the method should be tested further. Nevertheless, there are potentially important implications of this method for assessing other mediums of creative intervention.

It must also be noted that the findings presented in this article are limited to a small sample size, thus no representational generalisations can be made (Gray 2009). Additionally, due to lack of consent, the fieldworkers were unable to interview two young people, who arguably had some of the most challenging experiences at *Fresh Art*. It is acknowledged that had these young people been interviewed, different findings may have emerged. However, the findings do provide suggestive evidence that could be used to build working hypotheses to be tested in future research.

Additionally, although the interviews, observations and drawings provide a glimpse into the young peoples' feelings about school, post-intervention, due to time and funding constraints no follow-up data were collected to look at the long-term trajectories of the young people. This is a limitation that has been highlighted in a number of arts/drama-based evaluations with young people and an area for development. Future research in this area would benefit from a longitudinal approach that follows the young people through the intervention and beyond.

Coding

As outlined in the *Interviews* section, a collaborative, iterative and reflexive approach was adopted throughout the research process, with team meetings being held to discuss emergent themes. Following the fieldwork phase of the project, all interviews were transcribed and hand coded, using the research strategy of 'abduction' (Ormston et al. 2014, 6). In this approach ideas or beliefs discussed in the interviews are first described, coded and categorised using the participants own language. 'A technical account [was] then 'abducted' from the lay accounts using the researchers' categories' (ibid). These concepts were 'grounded in the data but [were] not necessarily used explicitly by [the] participants' (ibid). A subsequent round of 'data reduction' (Tesch 2013, 138) then took place, whereby links were identified between the codes. This resulted in the generation of three overarching themes (see Table 1 for main codes/themes and sub-codes/themes). Thus, through this process, the raw data was raised to 'a conceptual level' (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 66). The three main themes are explored and illustrated with verbatim quotes in the *Findings and Discussion* section below.

Insert Table 1

Findings and Discussion

The coding from the data identified three key themes that allowed people to 'become other':

1. Changing a social situation of development
2. Play and experimentation
3. Recontextualisation and resignification

Theme 1: Changing a Social Situation of Development

A strong theme that emerged from interviews with the young people was the idea of changing a difficult social situation of development, characterised as adolescent crisis, with a new developmental social situation. This happened partly through respite from a situation of conflict at school through a change

of physical and emotional space. The *Fresh Art* groups enabled the young people to work in a more relaxed, stress-free, safe, and open environment.

> *"Sometimes you just need space, like you don't always need to be kept in one room. In school, they'll keep us in one room, but here they let us go outside and stuff."* (Pete)

> *"It [Art] helps me distract myself from being anxious."* (Isobel)

This renegotiation of the physical space of learning allowed some of the young people to overcome some of their anxieties through what some participants described as the therapeutic qualities of the arts:

> *"It's almost like sort of therapy, like meditation of some kind of form, just being able to sit and get on with something you really love to do. And just you feel really good, and anything bad goes out of you."* (Richard)

For many, the feeling of respite in this new social situation of development was also linked to having the artistic freedom to explore. This in turn enabled more effective collaboration with their peers or with adults such as course leaders and arts professionals within a less hierarchical structure. The young people talked about being able to do something that they wanted to do, instead of being given a pre-set school task. The majority felt that they gained autonomy and control over their education and were able to choose the activities that they would like to participate in:

> *"You are free to do what you want to do, like in school if you wanted to do something, they'd be like "OR you do this", but here if you want to do something they don't say, or you do this or try and persuade you to do something else they encourage you to do what you said you wanted to do."* (Pete)

> *"Well you get to go out, um you don't have to do like everything they tell you to. You get to make your own choices basically."* (Zara)

In connection with this, the young people valued the encouragement and support that they received from the leaders and the positive relationships and friendships that they were able to develop. They also valued the active participation and attention of the adult professionals.

> *"… they [the leaders] sit there and help you do your work, and like they get involved as well"* (Nadia)

The young people appreciated the non-judgmental atmosphere at *Fresh Art* as they perceived that they were not pre-categorised or defined by former school labels such as being a problem pupil or "naughty kid". One young person (Abed) actually adopted a new name during the programme, symbolising the renegotiation of their identity. Through actively changing the social situation of development some of the young people were able to free themselves from some of the negative effects of the circumstances and labels which sustained their problems.

> *"…just being able to do what you want, being able to say like, be how you want and no-one's really going to sort of say anything about it. 'Cause like at school you'll come in wearing something differences or with a different haircut, and you're inevitably going to get a bit of sort of someone sort of taking the mick a bit, or something like that. But here you can just be who*

you are. And I think everyone sort of gets that, and they are not going to say anything, because like I said no-one wants to cause any bad vibrations in the atmosphere." (Richard)

The freedom to "be how you want" in an environment where they did not have to conform to societal norms represented an important development towards being "who you are". They chose not to cause 'bad vibrations' suggesting recognition of an atmosphere that matched their emotions. Richard had tailored his actions to protect this environment. This conditional or formative empathy in understanding the social situation of development has the potential to be applied elsewhere. The young people also talked about being treated as equals in the groups and felt that they were spoken to *"normally" (Kia)*:

"… the helpers here are different to teachers at school because you can kind of talk to them more, and have fun doing sessions, but at school if you step out of line, even by a tiny bit, you get into big trouble" (Isaac)

"… we got more freedom, we can speak differently than we do in school, and here we speak in a different way." (Abed)

Through becoming other, they were able to find and use their own voice and talk to people in a new way. The participants were respected and trusted and in turn they learned to trust and respect others. This fostered a feeling of *"acceptance"* within the group.

"I respect people more… Just like not judging people straight away" (Beatrice)

"… everyone in Fresh Art seems so friendly and like they belong there." (Isaac)

Theme 2: Play, Experimentation and Imagination

The second finding was that the freedom to play and experiment in the arts based activities (as discussed in Theme 1) paired with the non-judgmental attitude from the other young people and leaders removed the fear of failure that these young people often felt in school and helped them to develop their identity:

"At school you have to do a set thing and you can't do what you wanna do, and it has to be perfect. [At Fresh Art it]...doesn't matter what it turns out like…. There's no right or wrong with art." (Beatrice)

The activities involved both gaining confidence through the acquisition of a new skill and the freedom to experiment without having to find the correct answer. The opportunity to experiment also helped the young people to discover more about themselves and others.

"Because you learn, you learn about sort of who you are. Who everyone else is, how the world is, and it's just a really good feeling."

They were able to act in a new way within their new social situation of development and to try out becoming someone different to the person they were at school. Through using different mediums of art, some of the participants learned to express their feelings and themselves. For example:

[Song writing] "You can express yourself... Like how you feel." (Beatrice)

Additionally, the groups provided opportunities for the young people to try new things through learning new skills or by using their imagination.

> *"It's [Fresh Art's] been an opportunity to learn new skills and try new things"* (Nadia)

> *[Film making] "...You can express, kind of like how you feel, and try out new things that you've thought. Like use your imagination."* (Isobel)

Some of the young people revealed that they were able to use the skills and techniques of arts as well as self-regulation that they have developed at *Fresh Art* in their academic and personal lives:

> *"Yeah the new skills help me at school as well. Like 'cause like I do media and drama and the stuff that we do on the iPads can help me with media…"* (Abed)

> *"Yeah, and learning how to distract myself, and using them at home, so new techniques, new things."* (Isobel)

Theme 3: Recontextualisation and resignification

The third finding was that many of the young people were able to recontextualise their relationship with the social worlds around them. Through interactions with the leaders, the young people at *Fresh Art* were introduced to positive images of themselves affirmed through constant praise and encouragement. Some of the young people were able to reflect on past behaviours and problems, and to begin to see things in a more positive light. This in turn appeared to increase their self-esteem, self-confidence and resilience. Taken together, these factors led to what Cooper (1993:139) termed 'resignification'. For some, this led to a change in their attitude or approach to learning/school, and/or a change in their behaviour:

> *"[I've learned to]…just to try different things, just to experiment more, instead of just being like 'Right I'm doing this, and this is how it's got to be done', just to be like 'Ok I'm going to try this instead'."* (Kia)

> *"Well I always used to get anxious about things, which meant I had to go out of lessons and then the children would come up to me and tease me about it, but now I feel a bit stronger, and that I can stand up to them a bit more."* (Isobel)

For some of the young people, these changes in identity and resilience resulted in increased attendance and engagement in school and/ or a reduction in the number of disciplinary actions:

> *"...I think that because I've been at Fresh Art more often, I have felt that my brain has just completely just told me like go to school more than ever. And before I wasn't going to school, my attendance was in its 40s, and now it's up into its 70s to 80s and I've changed everything…I have improved my attendance and my behaviour a little bit… I've just felt like school would be more important and I want to succeed in life… I really don't actually know what sparked me off I just changed my whole, myself."* (Meghan)

> *"I feel a lot different about… [school] because I'm enjoying seeing my friends, I enjoy doing the work and it's a lot easier… you have less detentions and you don't, you're no longer an enemy of the teacher."* (Isaac)

Arts based projects, led by practitioners skilled in both arts and pedagogy, seem to have enabled some of these young people to acquire tools for self-transformation.

> *"It has changed my behaviour in my confidence, my attitude to learning obviously"*. (Meghan)

> "*And it's changed my attitude to teachers, honestly"* (Meghan)

In an exhibition held at the end of the project, parents, social workers and teachers were able to see and praise the progression of their children and pupils and provide direct feedback on their art products. What was striking for the researchers who were invited to this event was the extent to which all the young people identified themselves as artists. For example, Meghan who had produced three dimensional oil paintings told a researcher at the exhibition that through becoming an artist "I can face life in a better way. I am stronger as an artist, I get respect, and that helps me." Through this process of 'resignification' she had begun to project a positive image of herself.

The matching of need with provision was paramount to success in these interventions with vulnerable young people who by very definition may not have been as resilient as their peers. Whilst the descriptions we provided above show examples of positive engagement, it must be noted that this was not the case for the two young people involved in the projects who did not wish to be interviewed.

Drawing on one young person's interview data and drawings, the case study below provides a further example of the process of 'resignification' or 'becoming other'.

Case Study: Richard

Richard was referred to *Fresh Art* due to ongoing behavioural and engagement issues and was at risk of becoming excluded from school. The drawings illustrate, from his perspective, his experience during *Fresh Art* and the subsequent changes in his behaviour and attitude towards learning. For Richard, *Fresh Art* provided respite from a situation of conflict at school (illustrated in drawing 1 from Figure 1). He valued the positive relationships with adults and the open, therapeutic and non-judgemental space, where he was able to reflect on himself and his behaviour:

> *"… they [leaders] get us, us kids, I guess. At school I don't think, well maybe they do, but they are not very good at showing it, but they get that we, sometimes we just enjoy being able to do what we want and I think they… try their best to be able to give us that, to give us a break from whatever we are going through, and it's really helpful with everything."*

The pressures he felt at school to perform in a certain way (with peers etc.) were removed and he was able to let go of some of his anger and frustration:

> *"… it's just, you have space, at school you don't. At school there's always, you're always looking around, checking if there's someone you don't wanna see… But here, you can just be in space, and you're in space."*

> *"I think coming here, has made me a calmer person. I used to have a really bad temper."*

Richard saw the intervention creating a real change in himself. He used the metaphor of a gushing waterfall to describe this process of 'resignification' of identity and the unleashing of creativity (see drawing 2 from Figure 1).

"*Fresh Art* has been an experience of self-discovery….I feel like I've become a better person."

'Becoming other' is a process. Richard's final illustration of the waterfall and the bomb (drawing 3 from Figure 1) suggested that he was not entirely secure in his transformation, but that he had the potential tools at his disposal:

> *"…here what we learn, we wanna learn, and we care about it, and we're going to take it into the future with us…"*

This pattern of moving from negativity towards school, through positive feelings about *Fresh Art*, and finally to ambivalent or contradictory feelings about school was identified in four of the five sets of drawings. The final young person expressed negative thoughts about school in her final drawing, although in interview she talked about increased confidence and respect for others.

Insert Figure 1

Final thoughts and Future directions

This study set out to address the question: *Can a creative arts programme transform young people's social situations of development and, in so doing, effect changes in behaviour and way of being?* Through offering the possibility of different forms of experience, of experimenting with other identities in collaboration with peers and adults, the young people were provided with opportunities for reflection and personal transformation. Some of the young people were able to reflect on the things that they had been able to do as, for example, a photographer, film-maker, musician or songwriter and use the tools that they developed to help to inform their relationships and behaviour in other situations. Art may also have provided an affective medium through which some of the young people developed the capacity to reflect on previous experiences. As one of the young electively home educated young people put it:

> "*Fresh Art* doesn't actually try to do anything, at least not overtly. It doesn't say to you 'Ok, this is what you need to do next time you feel angry'. It just lets you let your imagination run wild, and you kind of work it out for yourself. " (Darcy)

Whilst Darcy was electively home educated, and thus not in our analysis, her words capture the spirit of comments by other research participants. In *Fresh Art*, the interactions with peers and adults were also important, as it was through these interactions and the (positive) feedback that they received from others that they began to internalise the alternative and creative persona that they had adopted. These experiences of 'becoming other' offered a means of engaging in the social world through a new lens of experience.

The arts based project helped some of these disengaged young people by replacing a difficult current social situation of development with a new social situation of development based on increased self-esteem and more positive social interaction. This qualitative study, whilst not generalisable, does provide evidence that a creative arts programme can transform some young people's social situations of development and, in so doing, effect changes in behaviour and way of being. The intervention that the arts organisation offered these young people provided alternatives to their previous personal, cultural and historical ways of experiencing the world. In 'becoming other', here as an artist, experimenting with different art media and trying out creative ideas within a safe environment, the young people chose to try out becoming a different version of themselves. The processes of recontextualisation and resignification suggest that creative arts interventions can lead to significant development social and emotional development for some young people with behavioural difficulties**.**

However, these transformations whilst real may also be fragile and further research is needed to look at the long term trajectories of young people post intervention.

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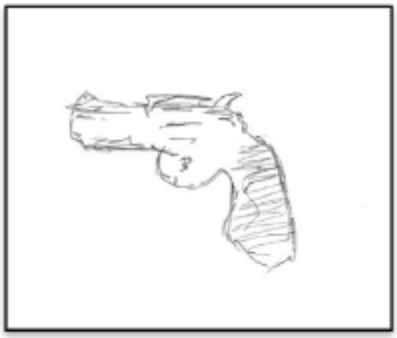
Table 1: Thematic Codes

Main Code/Theme	Sub-codes/Themes
Changing a Social Situation of Development	• Respite: away from school; art as therapeutic. • Reflecting on experience; exploration. • Treated as equals, not judged. • Change of physical and emotional space/ learning environment. • Positive relationships with peers and adults.

Play and Experimentation	• Acquisition of arts skills. • Choice, freedom, autonomy. • Experimenting: trying out different things in a safe environment/ not fearing failure. • Socialising and communicating with others (adults and peers). • New opportunities and experiences. • Expressing self.
Recontextualisation and Resignification	• Learning about self/ finding self. • Confidence: ability to face adversity. • Change in behaviour. • Changed attitude to learning/school. • Qualification, achievement, recognition. • Reapplying newly acquired skills in school and out of school contexts.

Figure 1: Richard's drawings

Drawing number	Young person's description of drawing
1. How did you feel before coming to Fresh Art? 	Researcher: "Ok so talk me through this one… so it's a gun?" Richard: "Yep, just kind of, just staring into no-where imagining being able to put myself out of the misery of being in school like I actually hate it that much. So yeah I just drew a pistol."
2. How did you feel during Fresh Art? 	Researcher: "Ok, this is whilst you've been at *Fresh Art*, can you describe this one?" Richard: "It's a beautiful waterfall; it's a nice green, tranquil forest with a beautiful sun." Researcher: "Ok, and so why have you drawn that for *Fresh Art*?" Richard: "Because while I've been at *Fresh Art*, I've felt not only just sort of peaceful, I've also sort of had everything that I've wanted to sort of do, and get out of me, it's just sort of come out. And while I've been at school, and I've just had things on my mind and I've just been able to think about them here. I've been able to do things I'm not able to at school, and it's just come gushing out like a waterfall... And the sun is just because I'm happy."
3. How do you feel now that Fresh Art has finished/you're back at school? 	Researcher: "And this is the last one, so this is now when you're back at school. So can you describe this one?" Richard: "It's just a crappy version of my previous waterfall with a nuclear bomb flying towards it." Researcher: "Ok, so why have you drawn that?" Richard: "Because it's about to get exploded, my nice waterfall, and I'm going to go back to being, not quite as miserable I reckon, but it's not going to be great. But I always have the thought in my head that once I get through it, I'll be able to get a job, get millions of pounds and then have a sick life. I hope."