

LEARNING POLICY



CHANGING RELATIONS
Creative methods. Challenging thinking.

As an arts education company, our mission is to:

- * transform the way people think about gender stereotypes and relationship behaviours
- * give a voice to those who have been affected by the issues our work addresses
- * generate public and professional understanding

From producing community-based participatory arts projects & publicly and / or digitally displaying this content, to delivering education and training to schools, businesses and communities, learning is central to everything that we do.

The way in which we do this is through arts-based and creative methods and this Learning Policy sets out why we choose to use the arts and creative methods to achieve the learning at the heart of our mission. It develops the ideas behind Changing Relations' [Artistic Policy](#) and arts-based methodologies, moving beyond the straightforward assertion that 'art is powerful', and detailing some of the different contexts in which our approach to learning enables us to change attitudes and lives. Our innovative work breaks down gender barriers, fosters healthy relationships and transforms lives.

Furthermore, this Learning Policy explains how learning is integrated into the different stages of our process, and indeed our organisational culture.

WHY CREATIVE LEARNING METHODS?

At Changing Relations, we believe that everyone is creative. Our work offers people the chance to develop this creativity, harnessing the potential of art as a learning tool through which to explore the issues that we care about.

DEFINITIONS*:

Learning – a process of active engagement with experience. It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world. It may involve the development or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, values, ideas or feelings. Effective learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more.

Creativity – the process through which people apply their knowledge, skill and intuition to imagine, conceive, express or make something.

Creative Tools – artistic and creative activities can be used to help draw out ideas and stimulate learning: the focus is on the activity rather than the outcome.

*These definitions are taken from the Arts Council's website: www.artscouncil.org.uk

There is a range of academic work highlighting the numerous benefits of arts-based learning, which we list here to underscore our commitment to creativity in the learning opportunities we provide:

1. DEEPER ENGAGEMENT

Arts-based approaches can prompt deeper engagement than knowledge-based approaches that focus on the theoretical understanding of something, often acquired through lectures and textbooks.¹

Educator and chartered psychologist, Eric Sotto, argues that 'Real learning doesn't happen when we are fed information. Learning is what happens when we realise that we don't know something which we consider worth knowing'.² At Changing Relations, our creative modus operandi avoids an overly instructive manner, instead using powerful artworks to challenge and organically stimulate critical thinking in those who we work with. That this approach leads to deeper engagement with the themes we discuss is evidenced in a number of studies and is clear to us anecdotally through our own work.³ In response to our 'Demystifying Domestic Abuse' training, one participant highlighted what is different about creative learning:

'This was an innovative way to help our staff understand all kinds of domestic abuse. It was visual & very engaging. Using real life stories was powerful & the session stayed with staff in a way a simple PowerPoint would not have done.'

Our learning model is strengthened by the breadth of our use of different creative forms: we are able to tailor specific projects to the needs of different audiences/groups, and appeal to a range of learning modes and styles. A study by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation offers a range of examples of the arts being effectively used for the promotion of gender equality. Its consideration of arts-based projects across a number of different countries highlights many of the ideas that we draw out in this Creative Learning Policy and stresses the need for more projects using socially engaged art to confront gender inequalities.⁴

¹ Gorsky, Emily, https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/blog/2020/04/27/what-is-the-difference-between-skill-and-knowledge-based-learning/?_cf_chl_captcha_tk__=pmd_O3iOlP9T2yfqsxAH_nwOKnlucN4qInK43R368OWBths-1635239501-0-gqNtZGzNA5CicnBszOhl

² Eric Sotto, *When Teaching Becomes Learning*, Bloomsbury, 2007, London

³ Heinonen, T., Halonen, D., Krahn, E., *Expressive Arts for Social Work and Social Change*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018

⁴ Kate MacNeill and Amanda Coles, 'Promoting gender equality through the arts and creative industries: a review of case studies and evidence', VicHealth, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/GenderEqualityArts/Promoting%20gender%20equality%20through%20the%20arts%20and%20creative%20industries%20report.pdf>

2. EMPATHY

Arts-based approaches to learning encourage empathy; a vehicle for experiencing what it is like to be 'other.' Philosopher Alain de Botton argues that art, when used as a tool 'has the power to expand our capacities beyond those that nature has originally endowed us with'.⁵ Art can be used to create a space for empathy, and our use of it as a learning tool helps individuals to develop an understanding of issues that may not have directly affected them. For those who have been affected, it can provide the space for deeper self-understanding and acceptance.

Creative learning methods can help people to gain emotional insights in a way that knowledge-based learning often does not. For the sorts of issues that our work discusses – abuse, inequality, power dynamics – this emotive engagement can lead to a change in attitudes, which in turn has the power to change lives.⁶ Research in social work has highlighted a connection between engaging with arts in a directed group context and attitude change.⁷

3. SPOT-LIGHTING PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOURS AND CULTURES

Creative methods can reveal aspects of problematic behaviours and cultures that might be taken for granted and start a process of change. In our work, we encourage individuals, groups and organisations to be introspective, and examine problems which are in many cases deeply ingrained and uncomfortable to confront. We recognise that socio-cultural norms are hard to shift. They're often unconscious and people can understandably be resistant to being told to think differently.

The arts provide a versatile and dynamic space to approach difficult and overlooked issues, engaging people emotionally or leaving them curious as to why things are the way they are. The qualitative nature of assessing changing attitudes makes it hard to measure work like ours, and there is limited research in our specific area. More has been written on the use of arts-based methods for peacebuilding, the findings of which are applicable to other social issues: 'arts can change the dynamics in intractable, interpersonal, intercommunal, national and global conflicts'.⁸

⁵ Alain de Botton, *Art as Therapy*, Phaidon, NY: 2013, p5

⁶ Foubert and Masin's research on rape prevention show the arts as a powerful tool for encouraging empathy: Foubert, J and Masin, R 2012, 'Effects of the men's program on U.S. Army soldiers' intentions to commit and willingness to intervene to prevent rape: A pre-test posttest study', *Violence and Victims*, vol. 27, iss. 6; Foubert, J and Perry BC 2007, 'Creating lasting attitude and behavior change in fraternity members and male student athletes', *Violence Against Women*, vol. 13, no. 1

⁷ Levine and Levine, 2011, *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change*, London, UK: Jessica Kingsley; Sinding and Barnes, 2015, *Social Work Artfully: Beyond Borders and Boundaries* Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press

⁸ Michael Shank. "Redefining the Movement: Art Activism," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 3/2 (2005): 531–559

4. SELF-EXPRESSION

Creating space for creativity allows for self-expression – we give people a voice! Eric Sotro argues that 'our most powerful learning takes place when we have had a suitable experience, and when we are able to reflect consciously on that experience. Such an interplay allows us to view the experience from a range of angles and communicate it to others'. Our participatory approach to making artworks creates a space where those we work with can explore how they feel about an issue and respond; for some, it might help them to see how something we have spoken about has affected them.⁹

5. A HEALTHY LEARNING DYNAMIC

Arts-based approaches foster a healthy dynamic between teacher and learner. In 1968, Paulo Freire wrote his seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, inspiring Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed', which promoted theatre as a means by which to bring about social and political change.¹⁰ Freire argues that the traditional approach to teaching which he describes as a 'banking model of education' (in which the pupil is conceived as an empty vessel to be filled with the knowledge of which the teacher is gatekeeper) is flawed. He contends that learning should be based on dialogue between teacher and pupil.

At Changing Relations, our model is based on working together with learners, who we see not as passive receptacles for our ideas, but as active participants, who we facilitate in exploring the themes we discuss. We aim to work collaboratively and encourage an open and equal ethos throughout our projects. This sort of model – one which dissolves the barriers between those creating (artists and collaborators), facilitators and audiences is encouraged across much current arts practice.¹¹



⁹ Huss, 2013, 'What we see and what we say: using images in research, therapy, empowerment and social change', NY: Routledge

¹⁰ Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, 2017; Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Pluto Press, 2008

¹¹ See the Arts Council's 'Let's Create' strategy, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate>

ART AS LEARNING?

Modern aesthetics, the course of which was set by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers in the 18th century, promulgated the view that art should be detached from life. Traditional modern art institutions have often emphasised the idea of 'art for art's sake' – that the aesthetic experience is tainted if the viewer has any ulterior reason to engage with it. At Changing Relations, we do not subscribe to this limited view of art, which is increasingly being challenged by arts organisations and parts of the 'artworld' who see the use value of art and the benefits that it could bring to society if it was more democratised.¹²

The 'social turn' and 'educational turn' in art have led to mainstream recognition that as well as arts-based learning being used in educational practices, education is a central part of what art can offer to society.¹³

Suzi Gablik argues that 'modern aesthetics circumscribed the role of the audience to that of a detached spectator-observer. Such art can never build community. For this we need interactive and dialogic practices that draw others into the process'.¹⁴

Stages 1 – 3 of our Learning Model (outlined overleaf) are examples of socially engaged practice: people are part of the work, not merely spectators.¹⁵ We believe that in order for our outputs to have the learning impact we desire, they must be of high artistic quality, however, the process of making the work, the dialogue surrounding it and the learning opportunities it creates are also critically important to us.

Pablo Helguera's conceptualisation of the relationship between art and education answers the unhelpfully binary question that sometimes arises about whether we are an educational organisation who use the arts (with the emphasis on education), or an arts organisation with education as a by-product of our work (with the emphasis on art). He uses the term transpedagogy to refer to artistic practices which blend processes of art-making and learning. At Changing Relations, we recognise that creativity is central to how people learn, and that learning is always incorporated when people make and engage with art.

¹² The movement 'Arte Util' is one manifestation of this shift: <https://www.arte-util.org>

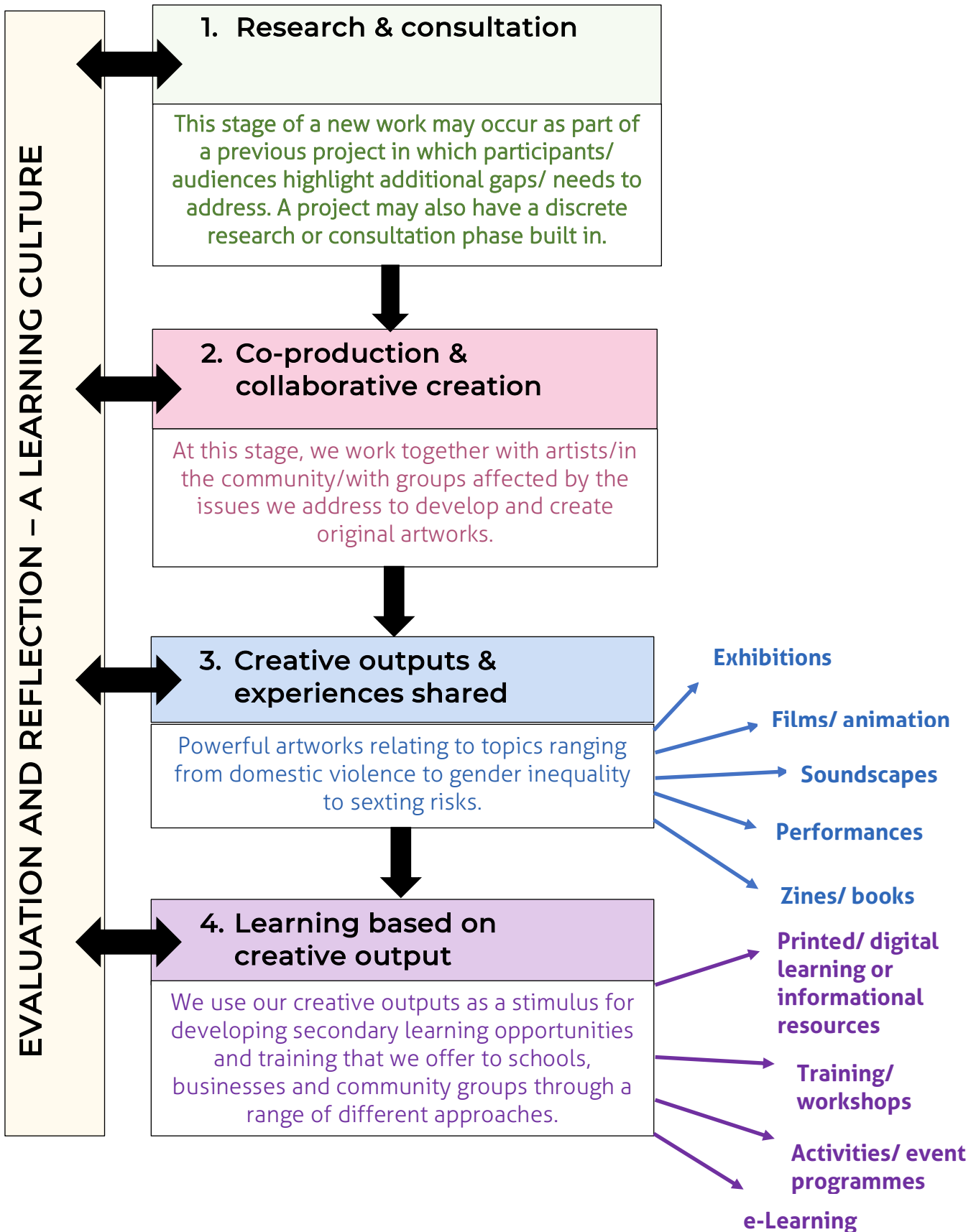
¹³ The 'social turn' was first referred to by Claire Bishop in 2006 in her essay 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its discontents', *Artforum International*, 2005-02 Vol.44 (6), p178; the 'educational turn' was thematised in the mid-1990s, and refers to projects where the emphasis is on the process rather than the outcome.

¹⁴ Suzi Gablik, 'Connective Aesthetics: Art After Individualism', *American Art* Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring, 1992)

¹⁵ influenced by the developments in aesthetic theory made by thinkers such as Nicolas Bourriaud (*Relational Aesthetics*, les presses du reel, 2002) and Jacques Ranciere (*The Politics of Aesthetics*, la fabrique-editions, 2000)

LEARNING MODEL

The model below shows the process that many of our projects follow, with each stage offering its own creative learning opportunities.



1. Research & consultation

This initial phase may happen in a range of ways depending on the project. In our history as a company, many concepts for new creation have come from audience or participant responses to previous [Creative outputs & experiences](#) shared that have indicated an additional specific need or gap.

For example, in delivering our 'Demystifying Domestic Abuse' workplace training to a school, where the focus from our side was on developing staff capacity to recognise and constructively respond to colleagues affected by domestic abuse, it became clear that a pressing concern for the teachers was how to respond to students who they realise are experiencing this within their homes. From this concern, we developed a new illustrated book and animation, [Sometimes it Hurt](#), which articulates young people's own insights into such experiences and the more and less helpful ways in which adults tend to respond.

In a more recent project, [Let's Talk About Sex](#), the research phase was built into the project itself, using an artist-in-residency model to create space for young people to share their concerns about their peers sexual attitudes and behaviours.

2. Co-production & collaborative creation

During this phase, we work with socially-engaged artists alongside various groups in the community to make works of art through participatory practice, using a wide range of media.

For example, in our project *Sexting Risks* we co-produced a film with young people at Ferryhill Business and Enterprise College exploring the risks and consequences associated with sexting. The process of creating a concept and developing it into a finished work created a constructive learning environment. It allowed the young people to engage deeply with the issues surrounding sexting and gave them the chance to develop their own responses.

By giving people a voice and a platform for their creativity, an opportunity for both self-reflecting and active learning arises.

3. Creative outputs & experiences shared

The [Creative outputs & experiences](#) shared often provide a learning opportunity in itself, which reaches and affects members of the public, as well as those who are involved in its creation or in activities where we use it as a stimulus. Those who

view the work – whether that be at a film screening, at an exhibition, or by picking up a zine – are engaging with the artwork's themes. At this stage, the learning is more open to interpretation through the process of audience interaction that organically occurs with public engagement.

4. Learning based on creative output

The learning materials which are developed from our **Creative outputs** are used to stimulate engagement in our training workshops and generate new resources that can be used in different learning situations.

For example, in the case of *Sexting Risks*, the project resulted in a teacher toolkit which could be used to engage other students through a range of activities based on the film.

This stage of the model helps us to maximise the durability and lifespan of our work, in order to achieve maximum impact. It is an opportunity for us to provide more guidance and structure around our creative outputs and the learning opportunities they provide.

Evaluation

It wouldn't sit right with us to promote learning amongst our audience members and participants if we were not committed to learning ourselves. We take pride in our reflective practice as an organisation. We are continually evaluating our projects and processes, gathering feedback from audiences, participants, associates and partners to establish where we ourselves can change and grow. We conduct performance reviews and learn from members of the community who care about, or have experience of, the issues we address, through our [Steering Group](#), who help to develop our ideas and act as a sounding board for new projects.

The arrows pointing both ways between evaluation and each stage of our learning model are there to indicate the dynamism of this process and the way in which we embed changes and improvements as we progress. It is not a static model, and as the **Research & consultation** stage indicates, there is scope for evaluation and reflection from one project to become the starting point for a whole new cycle of **Co-production & collaborative creation**. Further information about the way in which measure the effectiveness of this model can be found in our **Evaluation Framework** (available on request).

Other ways we use arts-based learning methods

Most of the projects we have carried out at Changing Relations follow the structure laid out above, while some of the training packages that we offer use creative learning methods in more contained activities. Drawing on fields such as play theory and gamification theory, we have developed interactive activities to stimulate learning and thinking around issues with a dynamism that knowledge-based methods are less likely to offer.¹⁶ Alongside using our creative outputs as a basis for our workshops, this sort of approach has been shown to improve what the participants take from the session.

For example, in our 'Demystifying Domestic Abuse' Workplace Training, participants are encouraged to make use of a doodle sheet which highlights the diversity of victims of domestic abuse. Later in the session, illustrations from this sheet are used to draw out different signs of domestic abuse. Through becoming familiar with illustrations of the real victims who shared their stories in our soundscape, Us Too,, participants are able to connect on a different level with the learning.

In training we facilitate on gender equality in the workplace, we encourage participants to think of working towards a gender-equal workplace as a quest. They thereby re-frame the situation as a challenge to be overcome rather than didactically imposing ideas to be implemented, which has been shown to be an effective learning approach in a range of studies.¹⁷

A LEARNING CULTURE

As well as the educational opportunities Changing Relations offers to schools, businesses & communities, we seek out training opportunities for our staff & governing bodies (our Board of Directors & Steering Group), support apprentices through an employability skills programme, and create learning opportunities through student and graduate placements which allow young people to gain work experience as they learn about what we do.

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¹⁶ Gamification is the idea that game attributes can be useful in non-game contexts such as learning. For reading on gamification see: Hamari, J., Koivisto, J. and Sarsa, H. (2014) 'Does Gamification Work? — A Literature Review of Empirical Studies on Gamification'; Huizinga, J. (1938). Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture. Boston: The Beacon Press; Kingsley, TL and Grabner-Hagen, MM. 2015. Gamification: Questing to Integrate Content Knowledge, Literacy, and 21st Century Learning. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 59 (1), pp 51 – 61

¹⁷ Seaborn, K. and Fels D. (2015). Gamification in theory and action: A survey. Int. J. Human Computer Studies,74, pp. 14–31; Carroll, J. (2002) 'Play Therapy: the children's views', Child and Family Social Work, 7, 177-187