

## Between Critical and Indirect Pedagogies: Participatory Arts Methods for Empowering Youth Voice on Climate Change

This paper presents a practice research based approach to the pedagogical, theoretical and ethical issues that arise in researching participatory arts methods with young people and their teachers. In it I will present findings emerging in practice research that could further assist pedagogical approaches to empowering youth voice on urgent topics such as the Earth crisis and climate change.

Ethical pedagogies arguably need to be included in the iterative literature that is gathering around what practice research is, and what it could become (Smith and Dean 2009, Bulley and Sahin 2021). Yet there seems to be a lack of a space, or place, to work through the complexities that arise for arts education practice researchers, when co-designing practice research and collaborating with young people. The project that will be presented in this paper has started to unpack complexities of ethics, inclusivity, creativity and voice – with a view to informing new perceptions that work at the bridges between practice, pedagogy and research. This proposal will outline the project in discussion, drawing attention in particular to the need for a synthesis between indirect and critical pedagogies in practice research with young people.

Youth voice in the Earth crisis is a global issue for education currently. The 'Fridays for Futures' school strike has called millions of students out of institutions and into the world, in protest against the extractivist processes causing climate change (Rainsford and Saunders 2021). Practice researchers in a partnership between a UK university and a national museum set out to empower youth voice, with arts methods that would be additional and complementary for their school curriculum. The research aimed to find ways of encouraging young people to reach out to make their voices heard in places that could make a difference, via arts practice.

The project's theoretical framework corresponded with posthumanism via researchers' dialogical relations with Deleuze and Guattari (2013). There was an evolving 'a/r/tography' methodology (La Jevic and Springgay 2008), in which art, research and teaching held equal

consideration. To enable an ethical and authentic connection with youth voice, we decided to use indirect pedagogies (Saeverot 2022) that we anticipated would elicit vocal contributions without being formative or limiting of young people's responses in the project. The project leader hoped that creating a supportive environment for young people and their teachers, in a safe university space that was not connected with the disciplinary architecture of their schools, would allow feelings and affective responses to emerge without direct steering from the researchers.

For a view of the project's ethics and methodology, there were three workshops held in 2022-23, two with school students aged 14-18 and their teachers, and one with undergraduate students. In total there were 87 participants from five secondary schools. All participants had received information sheets. All participants under 18 had returned signed consent forms from their guardians. The undergraduates signed their forms. All had received a project information sheet. They were fully aware that they could withdraw at any time. Two schools did withdraw, due to school strikes and difficulty in processing trip paperwork, so the researchers took in schools that saw the project on social media and were interested in participating.

Working with free writing and drawing, dialogic objects, sound and movement, students aged 14-18 connected with artists who respond to climate change, and information about issues such as loss of biodiversity, air-pollution and extractivism. For example, after hearing about the work of artists such as Es Devlin (2022), and Caragh Thuring (2022) in the drawing and writing part of the workshops, young people created expressive collaborative mark-making to let out their feelings in a safe space. Their mark-making was really noisy, full of energy. Some participants felt it was chaotic. After listening to a poem, 'They Came for the Shale' by James Tierney (2017), the participants then free-wrote a blank verse poem, and added a 'line of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 2013) of four words chosen from that poem to their drawing.

In focus groups after the workshops the young people talked about their experiences. School students were in some ways restricted by the presences of their teachers, but they could still tell the researchers about their emerging feelings and thoughts in connection with

the arts methods. They could also still say what they felt needed to improve, and the researchers listened to those challenging points that were raised.

One of the central issues was that in enabling a space of unlimited expression, with input of information about how artists have related to climate change, and access to materials, objects and technologies to explore, the young people felt that the practice research was too indirect, too ambiently therapeutic. They wanted to attain more of a purchase, and a targeted presence in their artworks, creative writing, dialogue and movement that emerged as responsive practice.

In the light of this finding in practice, the researchers decided to combine the accepting, tolerant, imaginative and nuanced capacities of indirect pedagogies, with the conscientizing, belonging, and transgressive protest enabled by critical pedagogies (hooks 1994, 2019, Freire 1996). This combination of energies, conveyed by the three pairs of arts practitioners delivering the workshops, created what could be viewed as an alternating current of spaces for focused self-expression. A critical-indirect synthesis supported art-making art that really enabled the young people to strongly communicate their feelings about climate change, tackling eco-anxiety in a supportive gathering of practice and reflective dialogue (Verlie 2021).

This research also shows that young people can be highly adept at co-shaping learning design and content. The paper seeks to question how such co-designed research and curricula could be shared further beyond the university-based project space, and beyond the resources that the researchers have created in dialogue with participants.

In sharing data analysis and findings, the project leader would like to further explore the dialogue between indirect and critical arts pedagogies, as generative processes for releasing imagination to take up meaning, significance and presence in arts ecologies of the near future.

(932 words)

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