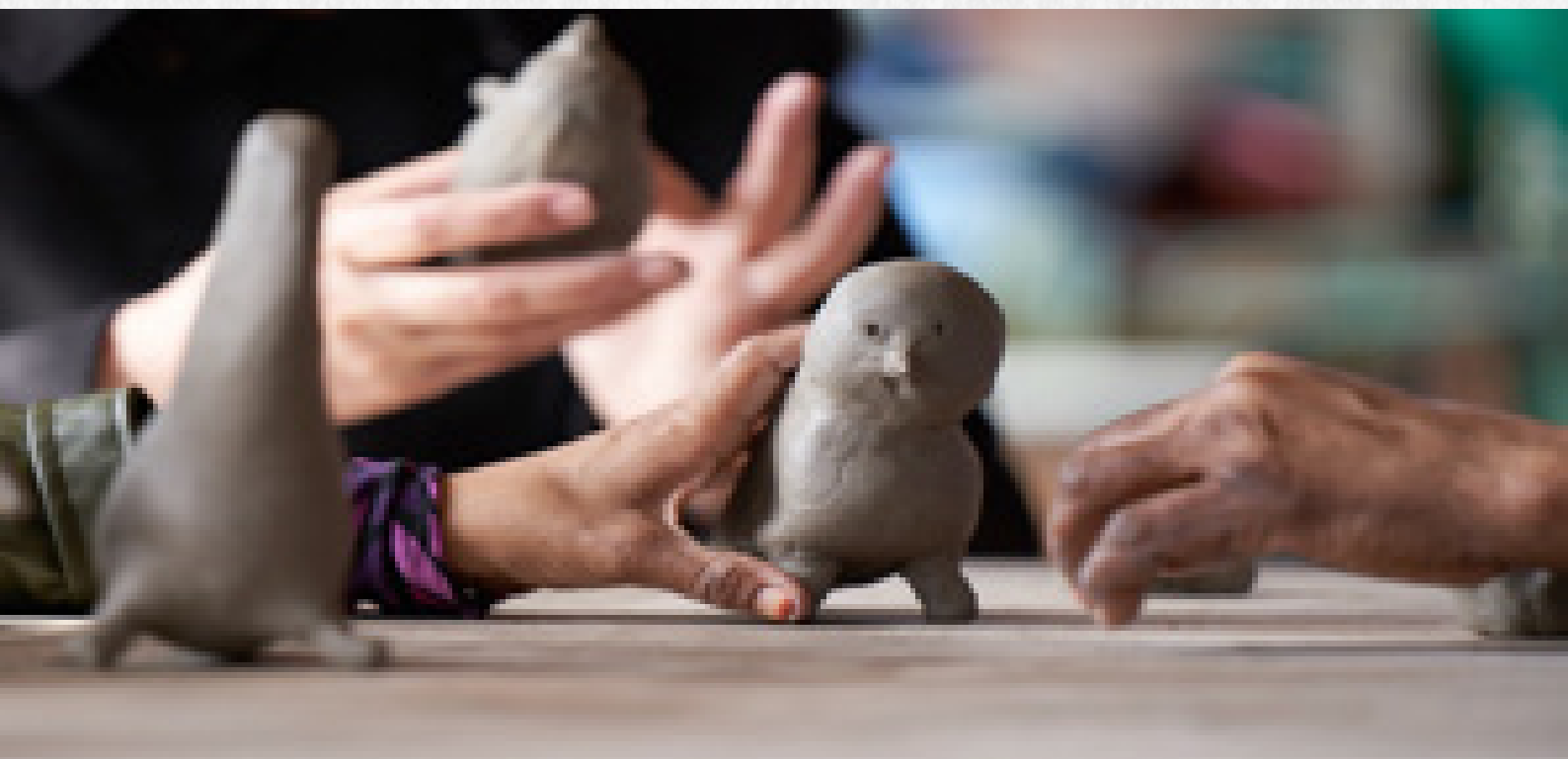


ARTS-BASED RESEARCH METHODS

with underserved communities



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG



TOOLKIT 2024-2025





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Woven into the booklet are
photos of projects, links to videos
and other materials and quotes.

INTRODUCTION

THE VALUE OF ARTS-BASED METHODOLOGIES

This toolkit is the result of a year-long collaboration between a team of researchers from University College London (UCL) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), working with arts-based research methodologies. Thanks to a seed grant offered by both institutions, we held four seminars in 2024 where we shared our work and involvement in arts-based research projects with migrants and underserved communities in various locations around the world, namely, South Africa, United Kingdom, Egypt, India and Pakistan. This toolkit encapsulates what emerged from those seminars, what we shared and learnt from each other, including the benefits and challenges of art-based interventions with different target groups as participants, varying in age, gender and cultural backgrounds.

Arts-based methods are integral to exploring and understanding human experiences in research, especially with marginalised and underserved communities, including migrants, refugees and stateless people. These methods encompass both the process of artmaking and the final outputs as they contribute to research,

participant wellbeing and advocacy. Our collaboration explored and reflected on how participatory arts-based methodologies can contribute to the mental wellbeing and healing of these communities. We believe that creative approaches, such as storytelling and art making, can help them to find their voice and agency. Arts-based approaches have proved a useful way to empower marginalised voices because the safe spaces created during creative interventions allow for underserved communities to share their experiences and in this way gain agency and some control over their own stories. Moreover, creative interventions can help to grow capacities such as resilience, creativity, self-esteem and confidence in relation to meaning-making, and mental and emotional wellbeing.

Arts-based methods also provide a mechanism to interrogate the notion that underserved communities populations are hard to access. They allow the inclusion of marginalised voices and civil society thereby creating a space for the co-creation of knowledge. Arts-based methods have also

“The multi-faceted value of using an arts-based approach is demonstrated through its implementation of art as method, art as output, and art as giving back to the community.”

“How do we find a way for
academics, researchers, and
the world to engage with the
voices of people who are often
hidden from society?”

proved to be a more inclusive and ethical way to gather qualitative data as the research subjects become active agents in the production of knowledge. This approach bridges “the intersectionality between academia, civil society activism and community work... And outputs of such processes can be deployed to challenge dominant representations of migration and migrants” (Jeffery et al 2019:3).

The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature of the team – including a cultural and social psychologist, a paediatrician, an art therapist and an expert on migration – enriched our discussions with different points of view and approaches to participatory arts research practices. Sharing our experiences in designing, implementing and disseminating our arts-based projects also showed how the benefits and challenges were similar despite the different contexts and participants’ backgrounds. During our discussions we realised that the participants in these projects benefit hugely from them and they have the potential of having great impact in communities and of contributing to real transformations. However, we also noted that measuring the impact of arts-based projects seems challenging. The arts belong to the realm of the subjective and the creative, and it seems

there are no rigorous and scientifically accepted protocols in place to measure the impact of these interventions.

This report features examples of strengths and challenges that arose in projects facilitated or supported by Humera Iqbal, Monica Lakhanpaul, Nereida Ripero-Muñiz and Kate Shand, as well as strategies suggested by these researchers to mitigate challenges and successfully engage with arts-based methods. Thus, the report aims to serve as a toolkit and orientation for academics working in arts-based research projects with migrants and underserved communities, as well as practitioners, facilitators and civil society at large. The toolkit is divided into three sections: the first offers an overview and context of each of the 16 projects we shared; the second is a reflection on a number of themes that emerged along our discussion about planning, running and disseminating arts-based interventions; and the third section includes recommendations for researchers and practitioners who want to plan arts-based projects.

We have designed this online booklet to be as engaging and interactive as possible, including live links to project outputs, photographs, quotes and recommended readings. We hope you find it useful.





SECTION 1

THE PROJECTS

This section includes a brief description, an overview of activities, reflections and photographs from each of the projects presented and discussed by the team as part of the collaboration between UCL and Wits. The outputs from each project are also listed, and links are included where possible. The projects listed below took place between 2015 and 2024, expanding for almost a decade and including participants from different locations, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and different age groups. They provide a good summary of arts-based interventions with underserved communities.



1. CHAMPIONS (2021-Present)

The *CHAMPIONS* project in the UK, involves children experiencing homelessness due to migration or poverty. Facilitated by Monica Lakhanpaul co lead Nadia Svirydzenka (De Montfort University), the project uses arts-based workshops to change the dialogues around homelessness with the aim of transforming the narrative around the stigmatisation of homelessness.

ACTIVITIES

- Researchers conducted a scoping review and interviews with families.
- Participants were invited to engage in activities like drawing representations of 'home' and co-creating a play, poems and creative music
- Researchers co-created a play at Bloomsbury Theatre with an artist collaborator based on the interviews with families to explore existing narratives about migration and homelessness.
- **Creative play session:** Engaging young participants in creative play using foods like apples and pasta while sharing their stories.
- **Drawing:** Enabling young participants to share their meanings of home through drawings.
- **Singing:** Expressing experiences of homelessness through song.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- A public mural with the slogan 'Every child should be safe, healthy and educated'.
- An exhibition at the British Science Festival of participants' illustrations displayed inside 13 vans of a partnering window company, accompanied by post-it notes for public participation with the prompt 'What does home mean to you?'
- Collaborated with an artist to transform participants' drawings into postcards with

REFLECTIONS

- Combining traditional methods with a variety of artistic approaches effectively engages children and families. This diverse strategy meets the needs of different audiences by offering multiple ways to participate and express themselves.
- Engaging with the community to meet their needs. Working with people with lived experiences to reflect back on what they've done. Adapted and built on it.
- Researchers modified their methodology when participants were uncomfortable with taking pictures of their homes and asked them to bring in objects instead that helped them to connect with the concept of the home.

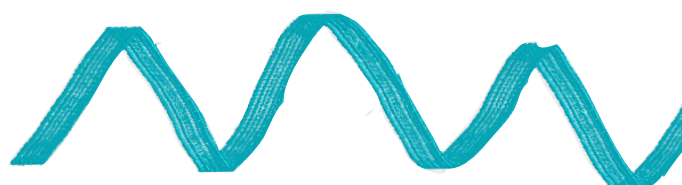
LINKED THEMES:

"Co-creation"
"Adaptability"

quotes about the meaning of home – these were then shared with the public.

- Theatre performance of the co-created play performed at the Bloomsbury Theatre.
- The play included a panel discussion with an MP in attendance, which resulted in a UK-wide campaign 'every child should have a cot if homeless' extending collaboration to overseas partners in Australia

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An exhibition at the British Science Festival of participants' illustrations displayed inside 13 vans of a partnering window company, accompanied by post-it notes for public participation with the prompt 'What does home mean to you?'

Theatre performance of the co-created play performed at the Bloomsbury Theatre



2. Child language brokering: Space of belonging and mediators of cultural knowledge (2015-2018)

Child language brokers (CLBs) are children and young people from immigrant families who translate and interpret on behalf of family members, peers and members of the local community who cannot speak the local language. The Child Language Brokering Project by Sarah Crafter and Humera Iqbal, explores how cultural knowledge and identity is mediated through children language brokering. In the project, participants from schools in England, aged 13-16, shared their language brokering experience through a variety of traditional social science methods (such as surveys, observations and interviews) in combination with arts based methods (such as art, drama and film). The project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

ACTIVITIES

- **Migration maps:** Creating timelines to demonstrate migration journeys and highlight when language brokering began.
- **Radio Podcast workshop:** developing a podcast about their experiences of being a CLB. These were used as voice overs for a series of short films.
- **Drama role-play workshop:** In this facilitated workshop, each young person was asked to create and deliver a short performance based on a small amount of information about an issue or event.
- **SCIT Workshops:** The Synallactic Collective Image Technique (SCIT) is an arts based method to form a collaborative collective story from participants individual stories around a central theme.
- **Sculpture workshops:** Led by an artist, participants created sculptures based around the concept of Ex-Votos. Over a number of weeks the young people developed plaster hand based sculptures, painted and engraved with symbols and imagery related to their identity as a language broker
- **Exhibitions:** Exhibitions were held in two schools and open to parents and other students. We also participated in the Bloomsbury Arts Festival and showcased the children's work to over 400 members of the general public at the UCL Art Museum.

REFLECTIONS

- A wide variety of methods were used to meet the needs and interests of participants.
- Cultivating a safe space and using creative methods to allow participants to feel comfortable to open up.
- Pairing traditional methods with arts-based methods to complement one another.
- Setting clear goals when working with artists and filmmakers around the aims of the wider project is important.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- Academic articles, radio programmes and blog posts.
- **Short film** animated by Alan Fentiman and voiced by participants.
- **Comic book** informed by S.C.I.T. illustrated by artist Kremena Dimitrova.
- **Final Project Report:** outlining key methods in the study.
- **BBC Radio Programme** with contributions from the young people
- **BBC News Report** about being a Young Translator

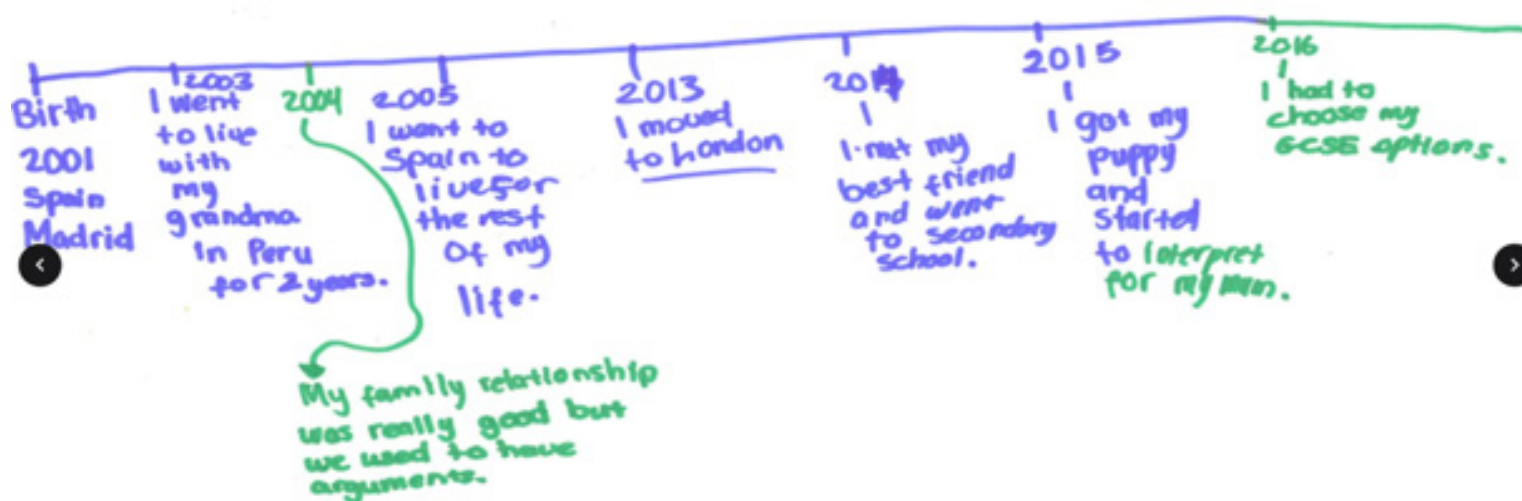
LINKED THEMES:

"Trust-building"
"Adaptability"



'The Witch at the Bank', an image created by 14-year-old Marta who explains: "On the drawing we can see my mother and me in the bank. There's the monster lady who is waiting for us. I usually can't understand it and makes my mum angry. In a situation like this I feel confused because I am not sure if I am good translating... and that's it."

An example of a lifestory timeline capturing the migration journey of Marina, who is a young translator for her family.



'The Mysterious Man on the Phone', an image by 13 year old Estera who explains: "Usually my mum needs to phone someone very important like the bank and she asks me to translate it to her in Polish. Previously I couldn't understand most of it which was always making my mum angry and me very nervous. I felt that the pressure that made me feel stressed. I hate that feeling when I can't translate something. Because of that I had to learn more and more of both languages. Now, I feel more confident but still quite unsure of some phrases. I am avoiding translating or interpreting to my parents. I hate it." The image was adapted by artist Kremena Dimitrova for a comic book about child language brokering.

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3. Constructing and deconstructing identities: Migrant narratives, self-fiction and personal mythologies (2023)

Nereida Ripero-Muñiz collaborated with South African poet and storyteller Dorian Haaroff to host a two-week workshop, *Constructing and deconstructing identities: Migrant narratives, self-fiction and personal mythologies*, with migrants from the Horn of Africa in Cairo, Egypt. The project was funded by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation. The workshop took place over two weeks and provided creative ways for participants to share their often difficult and traumatic stories of migration. Creative prompts were used to encourage participants to reflect on their past experiences, present circumstances and future aspirations, and share their stories with the group. It also trained participants to reproduce the activities for future sessions and during the second week, participants from the first week helped to co-facilitate the workshop with new participants.

ACTIVITIES

- **Mirrors:** Participants looked at their faces in small mirrors and reflected on what they saw in writing.
- **Collages:** Creating collages that represent participants' dream lives, paired with writing.
- **Migration maps:** Representing migration routes through different ways. Reflecting emotions experienced and future aspirations.
- **String of beads:** Beads strung together to represent important people, chapters of their lives and events.
- **Play-doh:** Fostering a sense of play and collective narration by creating characters and co-creating stories with these characters. The stories could be related to their lives and experiences of migration or not.
- **Support tree:** Representing supportive people and organisations within the migration process the on branches of a tree. This method helps with feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- **Letter to ancestors:** writing a letter to someone important from your past.

REFLECTIONS

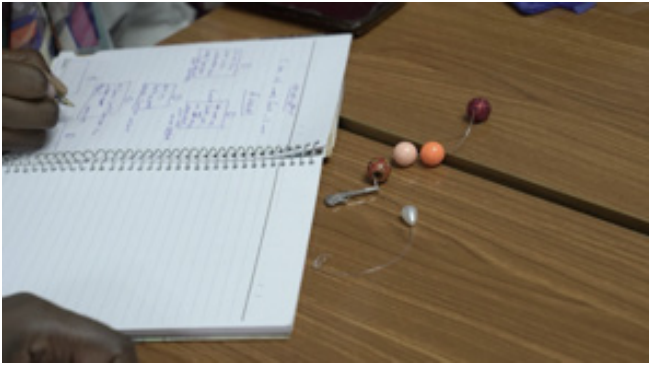
- Through the prompts, participants felt comfortable to open up and share difficult experiences.
- Participants were grateful to reflect on their pasts and futures, to gain a sense of not being stuck in the current moment, and to share their stories and express themselves.
- Second week didn't work as well as the first one. Too many co-facilitators who didn't know what to do when they were not presenting an activity.

LINKED THEMES:

"Trust-building"
"Healing"

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- [Blog post](#)



Some of the activities from the workshop, including 'string of beads', 'play-doh' and migration maps.

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4. Co-POWeR: Consortium on practices of wellbeing and resilience in Black, Asian, and minority families and communities (2020)

The *Co-POWeR* project involved young people from minority communities in the UK. Facilitated by Monica Lakhmanpaul with support for the artwork by Kartik Sharma Buria from PAHUS, the project used multimodal arts methods to create an online photo book and a short film about the support of role models in a boxing club. Collaborators included Anna Gupta , Royal Holloway University of London and Claudia Bernard, Goldsmiths, University of London

ACTIVITIES

- **Traditional methods:** Researchers conducted semi-structured and focus group interviews with participants.
- **Photobook and online exhibition:** Participants co-created an online photo book with quotes from interviews.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

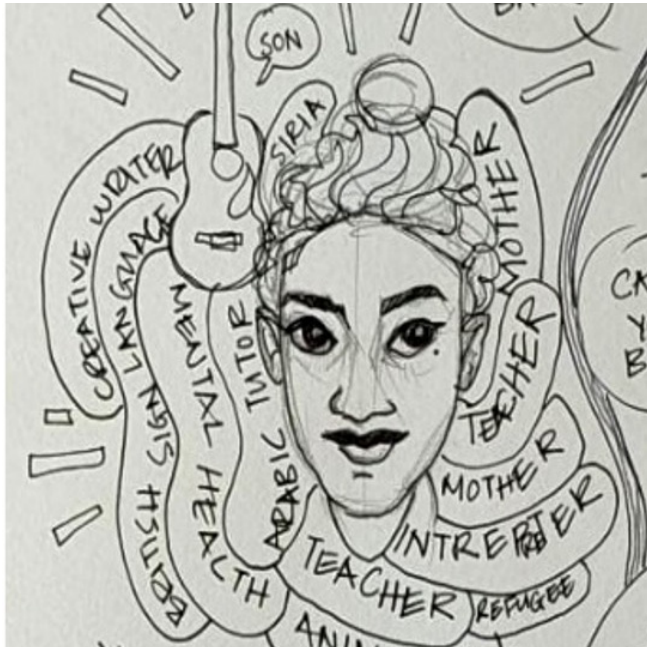
- Animation
- **Online photobook**
- **Short film** of participants' experiences of finding role models in boxing clubs by Florence Ayisi , University of South Wales.

REFLECTIONS

- Engaging with young people took extra time for relationship and trust-building. Young participants with complex and busy lives required more time than initially planned.
- Participants were happy with the photobook and felt a sense of ownership in co-creating the output. Participants appreciated representing their own experiences rather than being represented by somebody else.

LINKED THEMES:

"Trust-building"
"Co-creation"



Drawings by participants that were included in the photobook.

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5. Everyday Mayfair (2017)

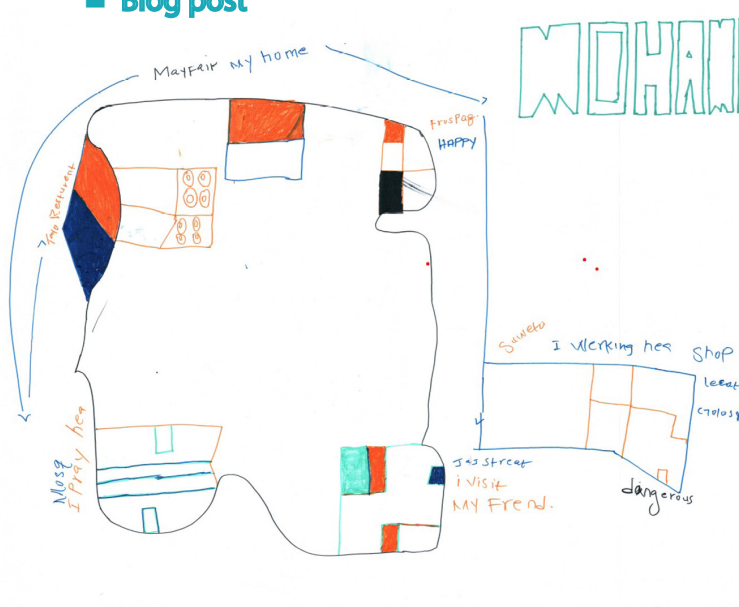
In *Everyday Mayfair*, Nereida Ripero-Muñiz and Elsa Oliveira facilitated a four-day participatory methods workshop in Mayfair, a predominantly Somali neighborhood in Johannesburg, in order to explore first person narratives of Somali migrants living in the area. The project was funded by **MoVE** method: visual: explore.

ACTIVITIES

- **Lifelines:** Drawing timelines of major life events, with dates and notes.
- **Neighbourhood maps:** Representing where participants go in their daily lives.
- **Photography:** Capturing images showcasing the locations they frequented regularly.
- **Migration maps:** Charting migration journeys within Africa and internationally, with colour-coded keys representing emotions.
- **Singing:** Expressing migration journeys through song.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- **Blog post**



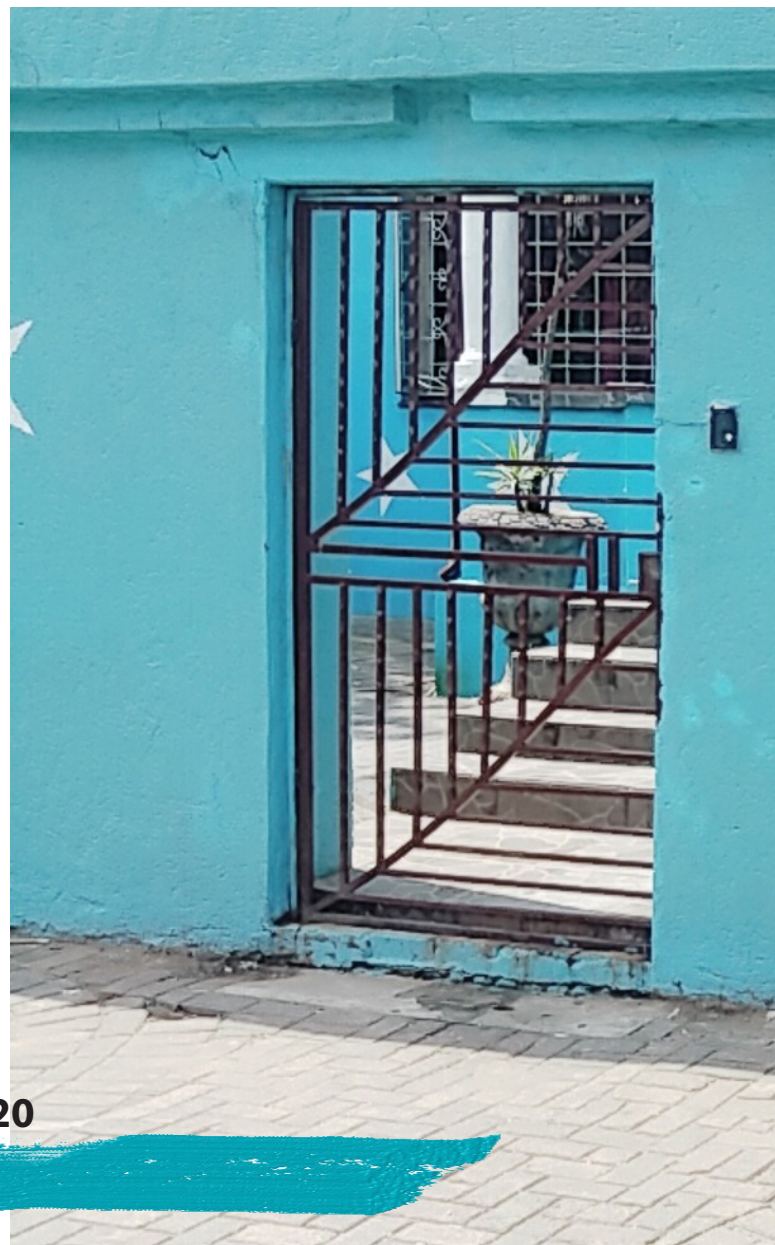
Some of the activities from the workshop, including photography, lifelines, neighbourhood maps and migration maps.

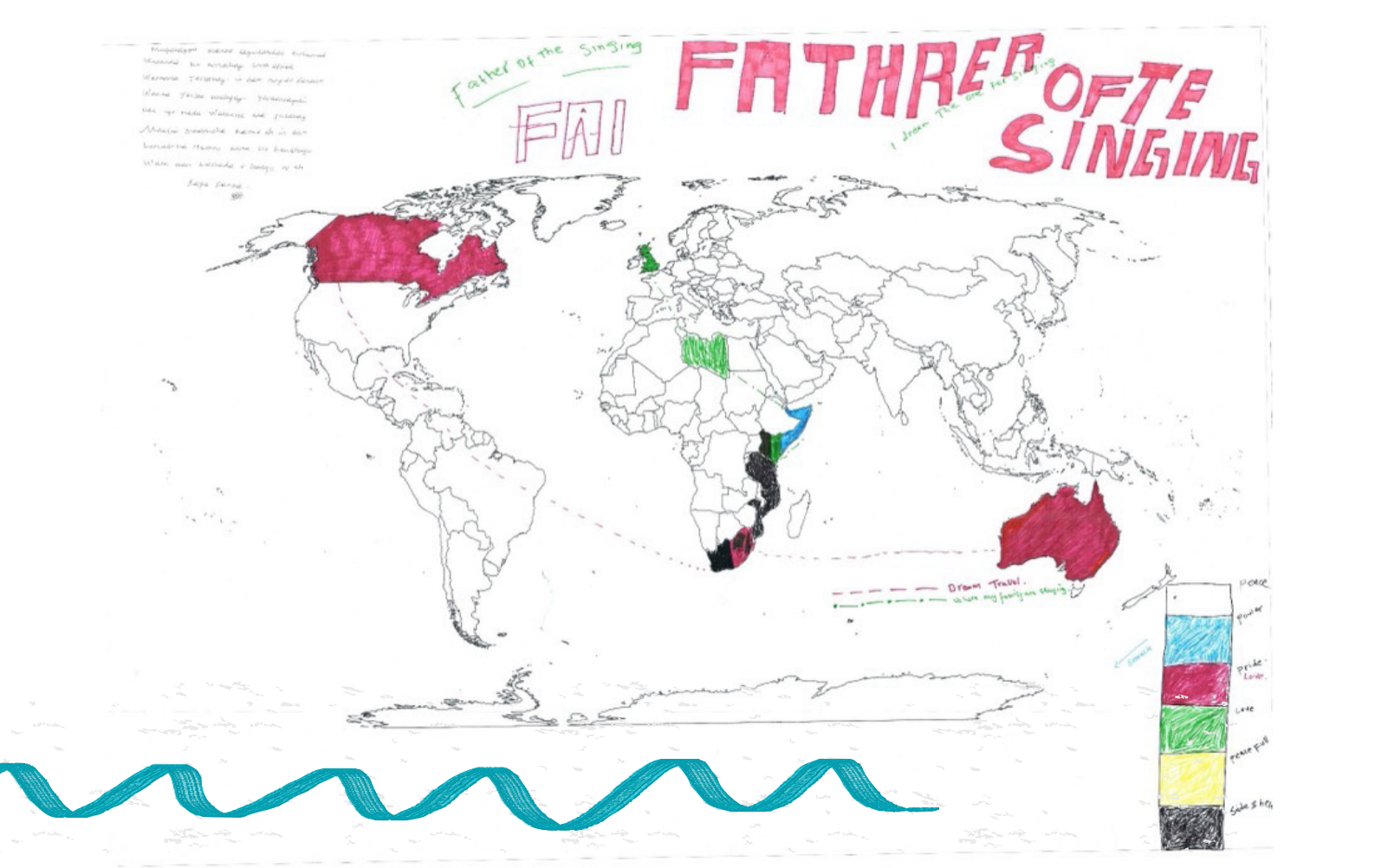
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REFLECTIONS

- Empowerment of migrants. Increased sense of agency. Participants appreciated the opportunity to share their stories and connect with one another.

LINKED THEMES:
"Healing"





6. FLOCK: Non-Clinical Art Interventions for Wellbeing and Belonging among refugee, asylum seeker and displaced migrant population (2019)

The *FLOCK* project engaged refugee and asylum seeker populations in London, UK, in therapeutic recovery through a gardening and horticulture programme titled The Grounding Project, which was part of the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. As part of this programme, Humera Iqbal, her team, and occupational therapist Helen Shearn collaborated with artist Julie Nelson to host clay-bird-making workshops to cultivate a sense of belonging and wellbeing among participants.

ACTIVITIES

- Ten workshops over three months in 2019.
- **Ceramics:** Learning ceramic skills to create birds from clay. An artist collaborator performed re-enactments of bird behaviour to further engage and inspire participants.
- **Engagement with artists:** Alongside our main artist, we also had performances and engagement by other artists including Tom Bailey; an ecological theatre-based artist who uses birds as a key reference in his work.
- **Public workshop:** During Refugee Week, participants shared their new skills to teach the wider community how to make birds from clay in a public workshop at the V&A museum.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- Exhibitions at the V&A Museum, Maudsley Hospital, and Lewisham Arthouse and Horniman Museum and Gardens
- **FLOCK:** Non-Clinical Interventions for Wellbeing and Belonging among refugee, asylum seeker and displaced migrant populations.
- **Lewisham Arthouse:** Flock project
- **About the Art:** Flock project

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REFLECTIONS

- Participants benefited socially and emotionally by connecting with one another and learning new skills, which contributed to self-esteem and pride.
- Participants connected with one another by being in a creative and safe setting.
- Using a non-triggering topic such as birds to learn about bird species from participants' home countries led to them sharing stories with each other and understanding each other's journeys. The flock of birds represents the story of the group on a journey and ideas of displacement, movement and connectivity.
- The increase in focus, mindfulness and self-esteem associated with learning a new creative skill helped participants take their minds off traumatic events and feel a sense of pride and accomplishment.

LINKED THEMES:

"Healing"
"Safe Space"
"Co-creation"
"Power and positionality"

The full FLOCK of birds developed by workshop members and Julie Nelson on display at the Lewisham Artshouse.



7. Hear Us (2022)

The *Hear Us* project aimed to amplify the voices of young participants in Chorley, UK, through non-traditional research methods. Facilitated by Monica Lakhanpaul and collaborators from UCL, De Montfort University (Nadzeya Svirydzenka), Leicester, and Inspire, Chorley Youth Zone. The project invited young participants to engage in creative activities, such as painting ceramic tiles and sculpting clay objects in a 12-week workshop.

ACTIVITIES

- Making objects and tiles from clay.
- Painting messages and images on clay tiles.

REFLECTIONS

- Working creatively with clay allowed young participants to feel more comfortable and to express themselves openly, especially in relation to topics such as grief.
- Young participants were initially uncomfortable working with people unknown to them. However, trust was built throughout the process and collaborators within the Inspire, Chorley Youth Zone worked effectively with participants.
- Considering the presence of researchers in the sessions and decreasing the number of adults in the sessions to cultivate a sense of comfort for participants.
- Working with ceramics was beneficial for participants with learning disabilities. Creative activities involving touch helped young participants feel more connected and provided them with a sense of agency while reducing the fear of failure and judgment.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- Exhibition of painted ceramic tiles, displayed with a short documentary about the project.
- **Transformative research practice**, youth support and young people empowerment.
- **Website**.

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LINKED THEMES:

"Healing"
"Trust-building"
"Safe Space"
"Healing"



*A participant admiring her clay sculpture.
The clay tiles on display.*



8. The Meaning of Home (2023)

Nereida Ripero-Muñiz and Kate Shand facilitated *The Meaning of Home* workshop at the Dominican Convent School in Jeppestown, Johannesburg. The workshops provided emotional and literacy support using creative methods to a group of migrant children from the Three2Six migrant education programme. This group of children had been identified as struggling with reading and writing, and having behavioural issues. The project created connection and safe spaces through multimodal arts methods and cultivated agency, creativity, cooperation and confidence through storytelling.

ACTIVITIES

- **Session 1:** Drawing characters.
- **Session 2:** Creating their characters using different art materials, such as clay, paper mâché and recycled materials.
- **Session 3:** Creating puppet theatres/ homes and improvising puppet shows with their characters.
- **Session 4:** Writing and illustrating their stories.
- **Session 5:** Creating and binding books.
- **Session 6:** Sharing their story books.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- **Booklet/toolkit** The Meaning of Home: A toolkit for storytelling interventions with migrant children.
- Journal article (to be published)
- Exhibition

REFLECTIONS

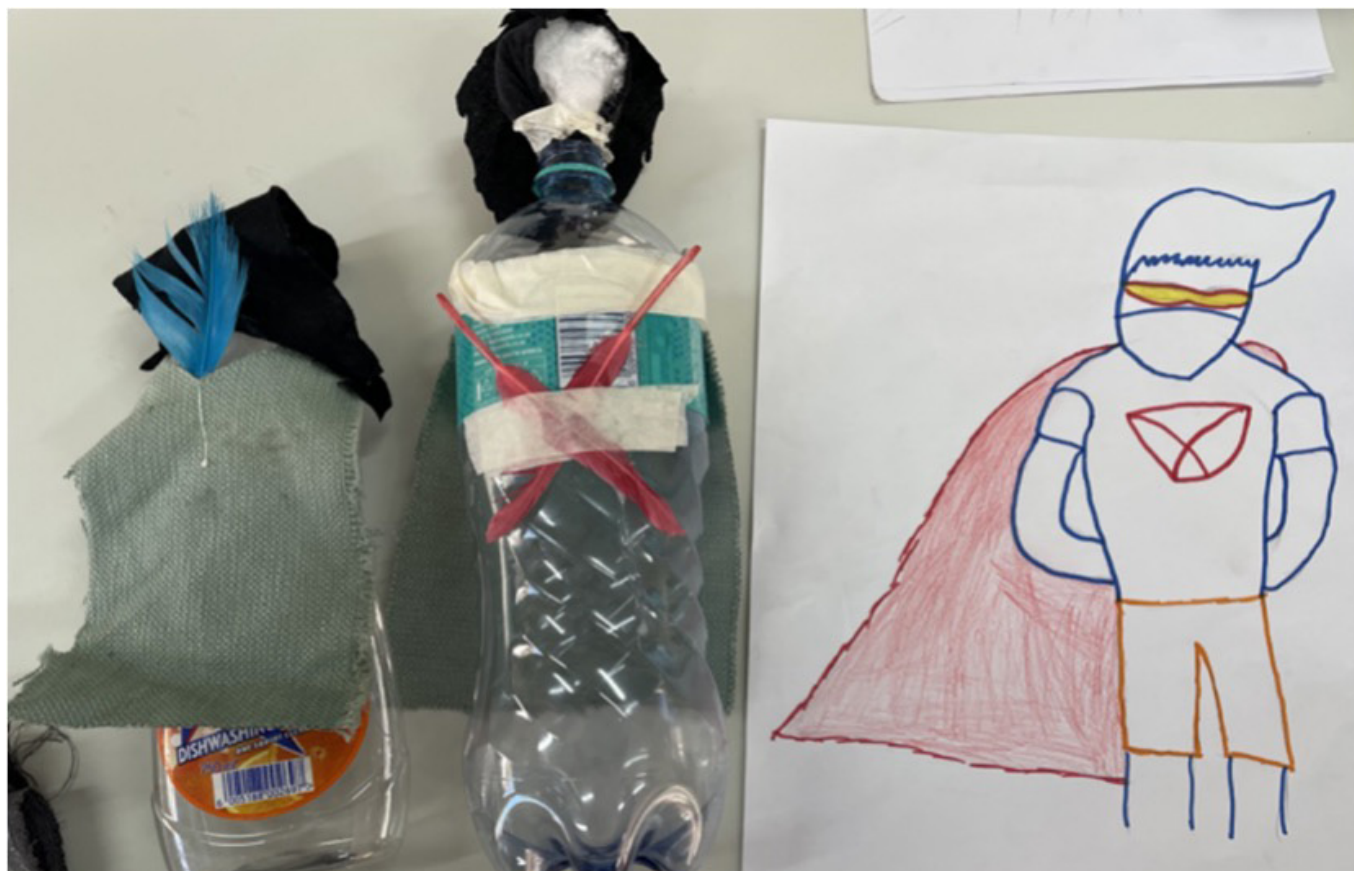
- Connections and cooperation among participants in a safe space.
- The researchers spontaneously created a shop for art materials mid-session to transform the experience and allow participants to choose materials more mindfully.
- Agency and pleasure in storytelling and finding a voice.

LINKED THEMES:

"Safe Space"
"Adaptability"
"Co-creation"

A selection of characters, puppet theatres and story-telling from The Meaning of Home workshop.





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9. MeHelp (2020)

The *MeHelp* project in India involved participants with lived experiences with mental health challenges. Facilitated by Monica Lakhanpaul, led by De Montfort University (Raghu Raghavan, Nadzeya Svirydzenka and others) in Leicester and a local drama company, the project used theatre to share knowledge about stigma and mental health, creating an interactive play based on participant interviews. The project faced challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the researchers adapted by producing short films instead.

ACTIVITIES

- **Traditional methods:** Researchers interviewed migrants about their experiences of mental health and mental health stigmatisation.
- **Theatre:** Researchers and participants collaborated with a local drama company to create interactive plays based on participants' experiences of mental health resilience in India.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- Interactive plays performed in the community.
- Short films about the plays.
- **Website.**

Participants from the MeHelp project.

REFLECTIONS

- Researchers and creatives engaged with participants and their families to better understand what challenges they faced and represented these experiences through theatre.
- Combining traditional research methods with arts-based methods to best understand and represent participants' experiences.
- COVID-19 interfered with plans for a bigger showcase around the country, however the plan was adapted to short films instead.

LINKED THEMES:

"Co-creation"
"Adaptability"





A Healthy mind is an
Empowered mind. A mind
which can battle your fear
Sorrow, happiness and desire

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10. Metropolitan nomads: A journey through Joburg's Little Mogadishu (2015)

Metropolitan Nomads by Nereida Ripero-Muñiz and Salym Fayad is a project that aimed to challenge xenophobic and victimised representations of Somali migrants in Mayfair, Johannesburg, by visually documenting the daily lives of members of the community. The project was funded by MoVE method: visual: explore.

ACTIVITIES

- **Photography:** Photographs taken by a photojournalist.
- **Reflections:** Some participants were interviewed and their reflections used in the project.
- **Exhibition:** Photographic exhibition

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- National and international exhibitions
- An open access [ebook](#), including images and reflections on the project
- **Photo essay**

REFLECTIONS

- Initially participants were suspicious and hesitant to participate in the project.
- Trust was gained by thoroughly explaining the research aims and outcomes and building relationships.
- Ethical tensions about consent and ownership.

LINKED THEMES:

"Trust-building"
"Ethics"

A selection of images from the ebook and exhibition.





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11. Myths and Moods (2022-present)

The *Myths and Moods* project by Monica Lakhanpaul in Rajasthan, India, supported by Hemant Chaturverdi, focused on understanding myths and beliefs around early nutrition and the treatment of sick children while respectfully engaging with alternative health professionals and spiritual leaders. The project used a multimodal approach, including photography and filmmaking, to document local beliefs and co-create an award-winning short film by Kartik Sharma Buria which showcased community rituals. The project was well-received by the community, who appreciated the respectful approach and the focus on the beauty of Rajasthan.

ACTIVITIES

- **Photography:** Researchers documented rituals in the community using photography.
- **Filmmaking:** Researchers co-created a short film with a local filmmaker and members of the community showcasing their rituals.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- **Film**, directed by Kartik Sharma Buria
- **Book** (upcoming)
- **YouTube link**

REFLECTIONS

- Carefully approaching how to engage with and discuss myths and beliefs about nutrition and healthcare treatment to avoid criticising communities.

LINKED THEMES:
"Ethics"





“Carefully approaching how to engage with and discuss myths and beliefs about nutrition and healthcare treatment to avoid criticising communities.”

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12. PANChSHEEL: Participatory approach for nutrition and children strengthening health education, engineering environment linkages (2017-2020)

The *PANChSHEEL* project, located in Rajasthan, India, engaged adults and children in local tribal communities to understand fragile points in healthcare and education systems, and to explore children's experiences of COVID-19. Facilitated by Monica Lakhanpaul, the research team, supported by Save the Children, Hemant Chatruverdi and local fieldworkers, the project used multimodal arts-based activities.

ACTIVITIES

COVID-19 arts-based workshops:

- **Drawing:** Creating visual representations, with captions, to showcase their experiences of COVID-19.

Nutrition and healthcare education and advocacy:

- **Messaging:** Collaborating on educational messages to paint onto walls in public spaces and print onto water bottles.
- **Performance:** Creating plays, skits and songs on hand washing, hygiene and nutrition.
- **Poster-making:** Co-creating educational posters with pictures and information on health and nutrition.
- **Photography:** Participants photographing community members and co-creating a virtual gallery, with captions.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- Virtual gallery exhibition
- Wall painting in the village
- Short documentary
- Journal article
- Online photobook with quotes from interviews
- **Arts and science panel for discussion and knowledge exchange**
- **Website**

REFLECTIONS

- Working with a fieldworker from the community to build relationships and training members of the community to lead sessions.
- Considering the power imbalance of researchers and community members and engaging with community members to dilute the imbalance.
- Respecting and responding to gender dynamics in the community by offering women-only focus groups. Considering literacy challenges in the process by including a translator and in the output by creating visual material.
- Engaging community members of all ages and across villages to include them in the research design and outputs.
- COVID-19 interfered with plans for an in-person exhibition, however the plan was adapted to a virtual exhibition which allowed for further reach, inclusivity and longevity.



Some activities from the project including poster-making, performance and relationship-building



LINKED THEMES:

"Trust-building"
 "Power and positionality"
 "Collaboration"
 "Co-creation"
 "Adaptability"

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13. Partition of identity: An exploration of citizenship and belonging in Pakistani Bengalis (1971-present) (2020-2024)

Partition of Identity is the first in-depth study capturing the everyday life, stories and history of the three million strong Pakistani Bengali community based mainly in Karachi, Pakistan. This interdisciplinary project, grounded in history and social psychology uses a combination of traditional and arts-based methods to study the community, and in particular the challenges many have faced around citizenship and belonging. The project by Humera Iqbal, Anushay Malik and Maria Rashid partnered with Imkaan Welfare Organisation, an NGO who work with the community in Karachi, Pakistan. The project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Key methods used were art-based workshops, alongside in-depth oral history interviews with adults and young people and archival work outputs including writing, a documentary film, an animation, music video, sculpture, photography, music, digital art and a comic book.

ACTIVITIES

- **Traditional methods:** Researchers conducted archival work, media analysis and oral history interviews.
- **Artist collaboration:** Artists based at Indus Valley School of Arts and Architecture, as well as a UK based artist used the findings from the traditional methods to artistically reimagine and represent the community's story in different ways.
- **Documentary feature film:** A feature film was made, following the everyday stories of young and old Pakistani Bengalis as they chase their dreams, find love, stand up for injustices, and face despair around their lack of recognition in Pakistan.
- **Drawing and painting workshops:** Participants created self-portraits for identity cards and creatively expressed their future dreams.
- **Ceramic based work:** Participants reflected what they like and dislike about their community painting onto clay pots.
- **S.C.I.T.:** The Synallactic Collective Image

Technique (SCIT) is an arts-based method to form a collaborative collective story from participants individual stories around a central theme.

- **Activist Art:** Workshops were held in which young people expressed their concerns and hopes in Letters to the Prime Minister. These were then posted to the Prime Minister



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REFLECTIONS

- Amplifying voices, promoting dialogue, sharing outputs, and fostering understanding through art and engagement. Focusing on presenting key contributions and strengths of the community.
- Using a range of research methods to understand an issue from multiple perspectives.
- Collaborating with others on an interdisciplinary team including artists, academics, community members and NGOs. This involved working across different languages.
- Goal alignment across multidisciplinary team, negotiating power dynamics with team and building a shared understanding of interdisciplinary methods.
- Navigating power, class and positionality in co-produced arts-based work.
- Considering the impacts of the outputs when working with vulnerable groups and making deliberate and careful choices in representing their narratives, such as in editing the documentary and exhibiting outputs.
- Designing a powerful logo and an effective website that have longevity and deciding how to disseminate outputs.
- Ensuring there is time for reflection for emotionally-charged creative work

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- Bhashaili (Adrift) **documentary**
- The Others (**Animation**)
- **Creation of Art pieces** from artists, including sculptures, children's books, photography, acrylics-based work, music and music videos
- **A series of exhibitions and film screenings** in Karachi, London, Kuala Lumpur with the community, the public and third sector organisations.
- **A website** showcasing artistic outputs
- A Comic book informed by the S.C.I.T.
- **The Letters to the Prime Minister Advocacy Campaign.** This was a weeklong national campaign held around raising awareness of the challenges faced by the community.
- **A full output report** with methods and artistic outputs from the project

LINKED THEMES:

"Advocacy"
"Collaboration"
"Power and positionality"
"Ethics"
"Legacy"
"Researcher wellbeing"



14. SPROCKET (2024)

With *SPROCKET*, Monica Lakhanpaul supported by the wider research team and children and their families aimed to amplify the voices of families and children living with complex needs. The project uses participatory arts-based research methods and storytelling. The SPROCKET team can be found [on their website](#).

ACTIVITIES

- **Paper planes:** Creating paper planes with messages and throwing them.
- **Arts and crafts:** Working with arts materials to create, draw and play.
- **Board games:** Using board games for children to express their experiences of accessing health services.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- Youtube videos
- Upcoming report

REFLECTIONS

- Integrating food as a central element enhanced engagement and created a more inviting and comfortable environment for participants.
- Adapting the format to include family members, even though their participation was not initially planned, cultivated a more inclusive, comfortable and collaborative atmosphere.
- Difficulty in separating children from family members, which may have affected engagement and participation of children in the project if the researchers had not adapted to include the parents.

LINKED THEMES:

"Adaptability"

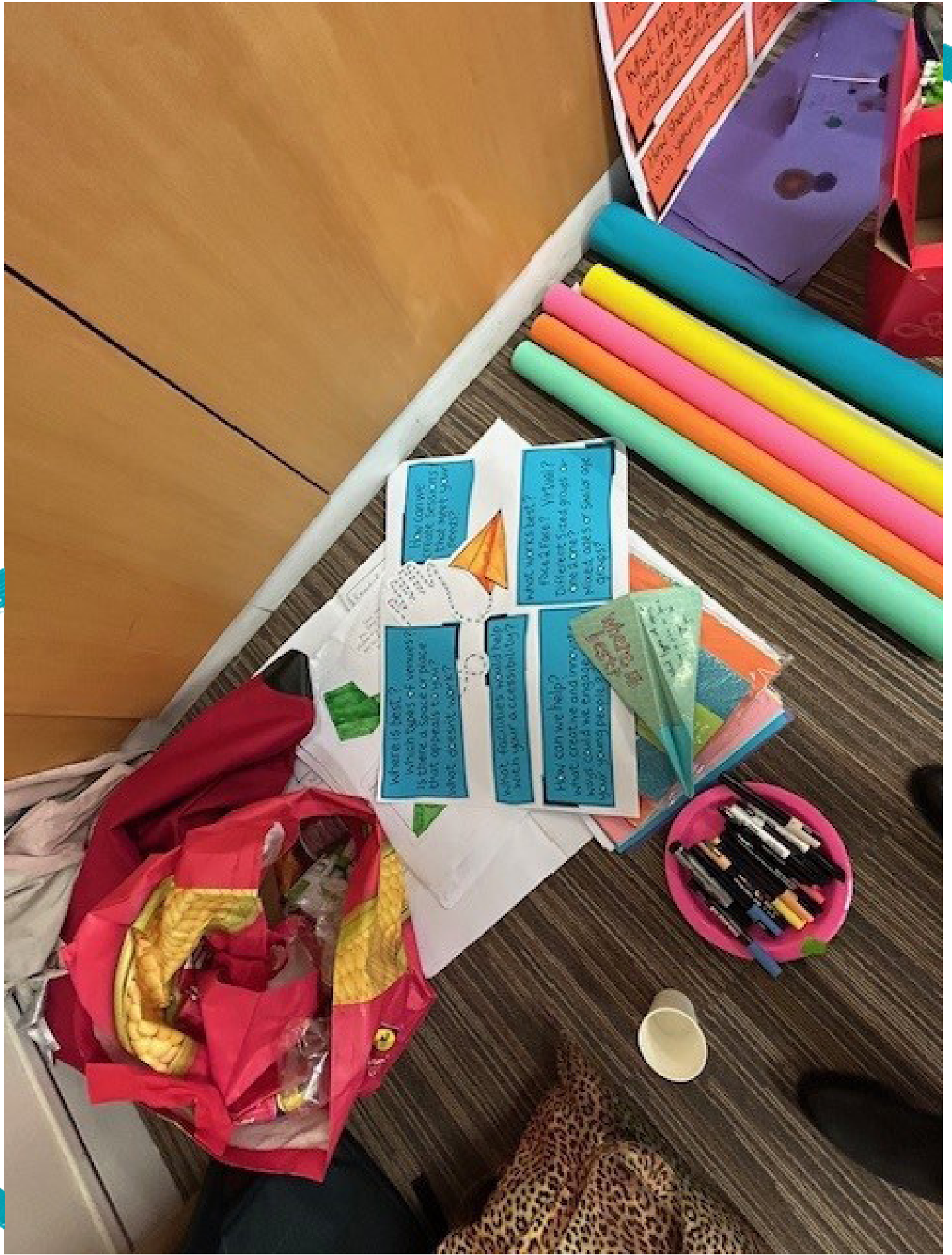
"Trust-building"



Activities and outputs from the project.



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15. Toilet Tales: The untold story on sanitation infrastructure (2019-present)

Toilet Tales is an ongoing international project documenting sanitation infrastructure in India. Facilitated by Monica Lakhanpaul, Julia Vila-Guilera, Hemant Chaturvedi with support from Diana Rosenthal, the project uses creative storytelling and photography to document unused or abandoned toilets in India.

ACTIVITIES

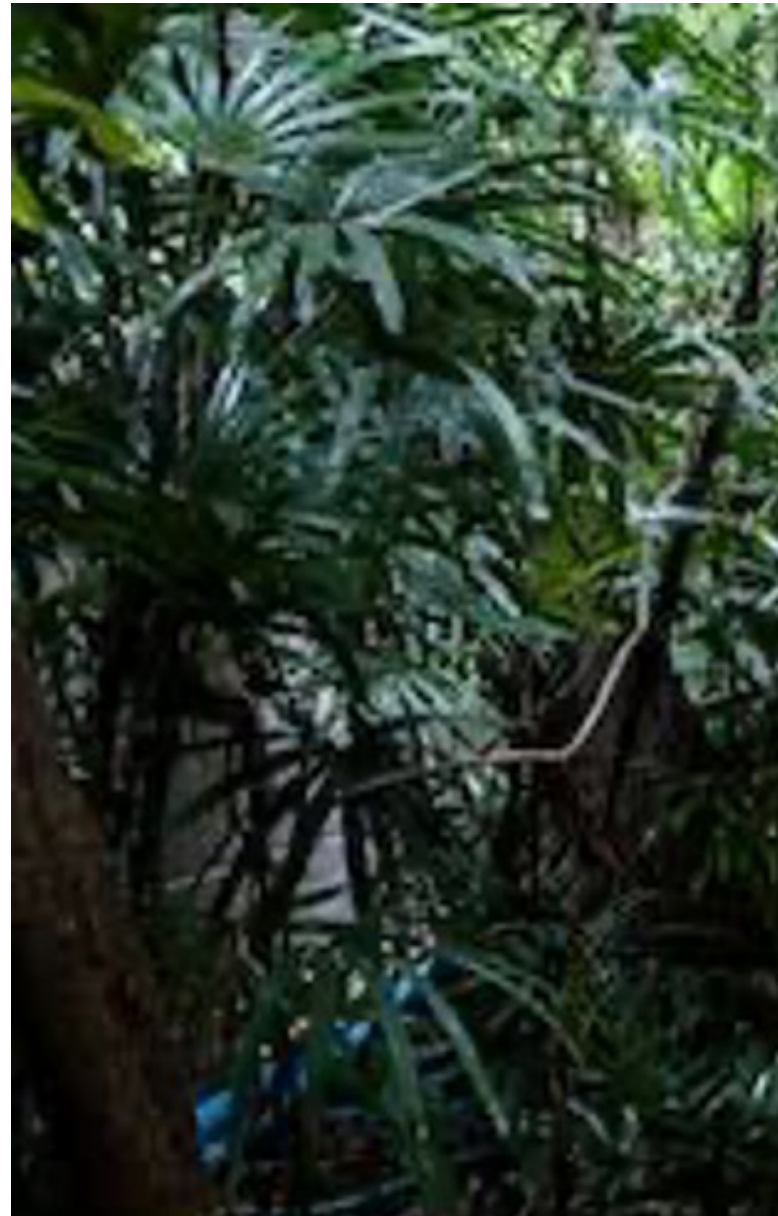
- **Photography:** Researchers and members of the community captured photographs of abandoned toilets in India.
- **Creative writing:** Researchers produced creative stories based on submissions from community members to accompany the photographed toilets.

REFLECTIONS

- Considering the sensitivity and potential risks of engaging with government-funded infrastructure and protecting those who participated.
- Building relationships with community members to feel comfortable sending in photographs of toilets and sharing their experiences. Communicating with participants what the purpose of the project is and how their submissions will be framed and showcased.
- Considering the contextual impact of the project as some community members were hesitant to participate in a project that addresses government-funded infrastructure.
- Participants were enabled to use their imaginations to address an issue in their communities and felt the narrative of the stories was amusing and constructive.

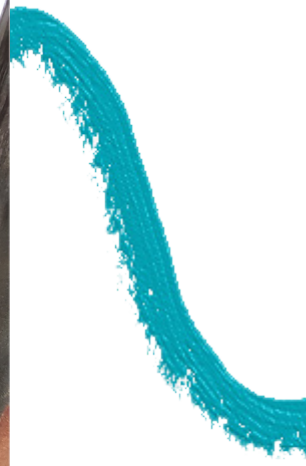
OUTCOMES/LINKS

- Book (upcoming)



LINKED THEMES:

"Ethics"
"Trust-building"
"Power and positionality"
"Co-creation"



16. Uhambo literacy programme (2017-2020)

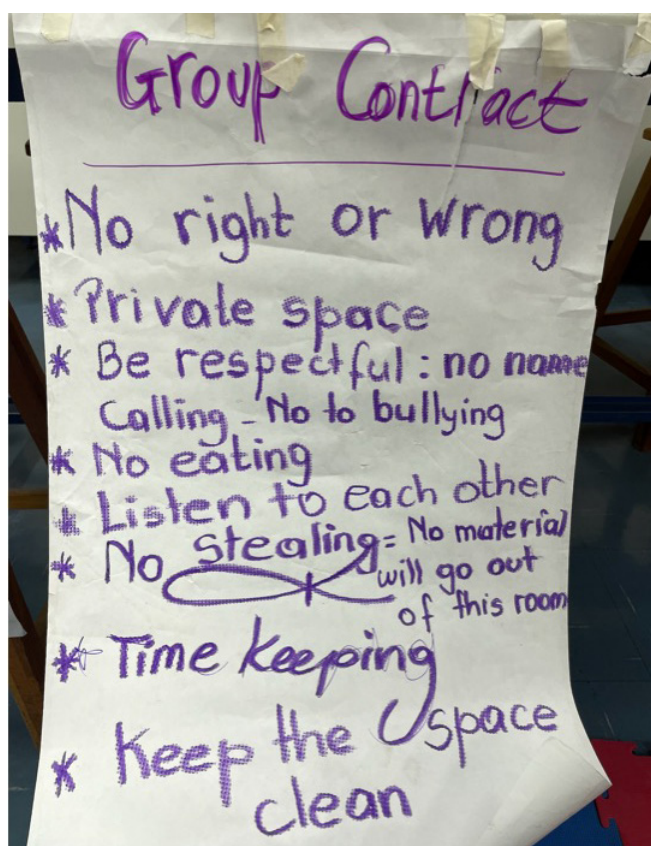
In *Uhambo*, Kate Shand and her team at arts-therapy organisation Lefika la Phodiso in Johannesburg, aimed to enhance the literacy and self-expression of children – who were identified as not reading or writing – through a series of multimodal arts-based workshops. Workshop activities included drawing characters, making puppets, improvised performances, making books, and writing stories.

ACTIVITIES

- **Session 1:** Drawing characters.
- **Sessions 2 and 3:** Creating their characters using different art materials, such as clay, paper mâché and recycled materials.
- **Sessions 4 and 5:** Improvising stories with their characters through performance, including plays and puppet shows.
- **Sessions 6 and 7:** Writing and illustrating their stories.
- **Session 8:** Creating and binding books.
- **Session 9:** Sharing their story books.

OUTCOMES/LINKS

- **Journal article**



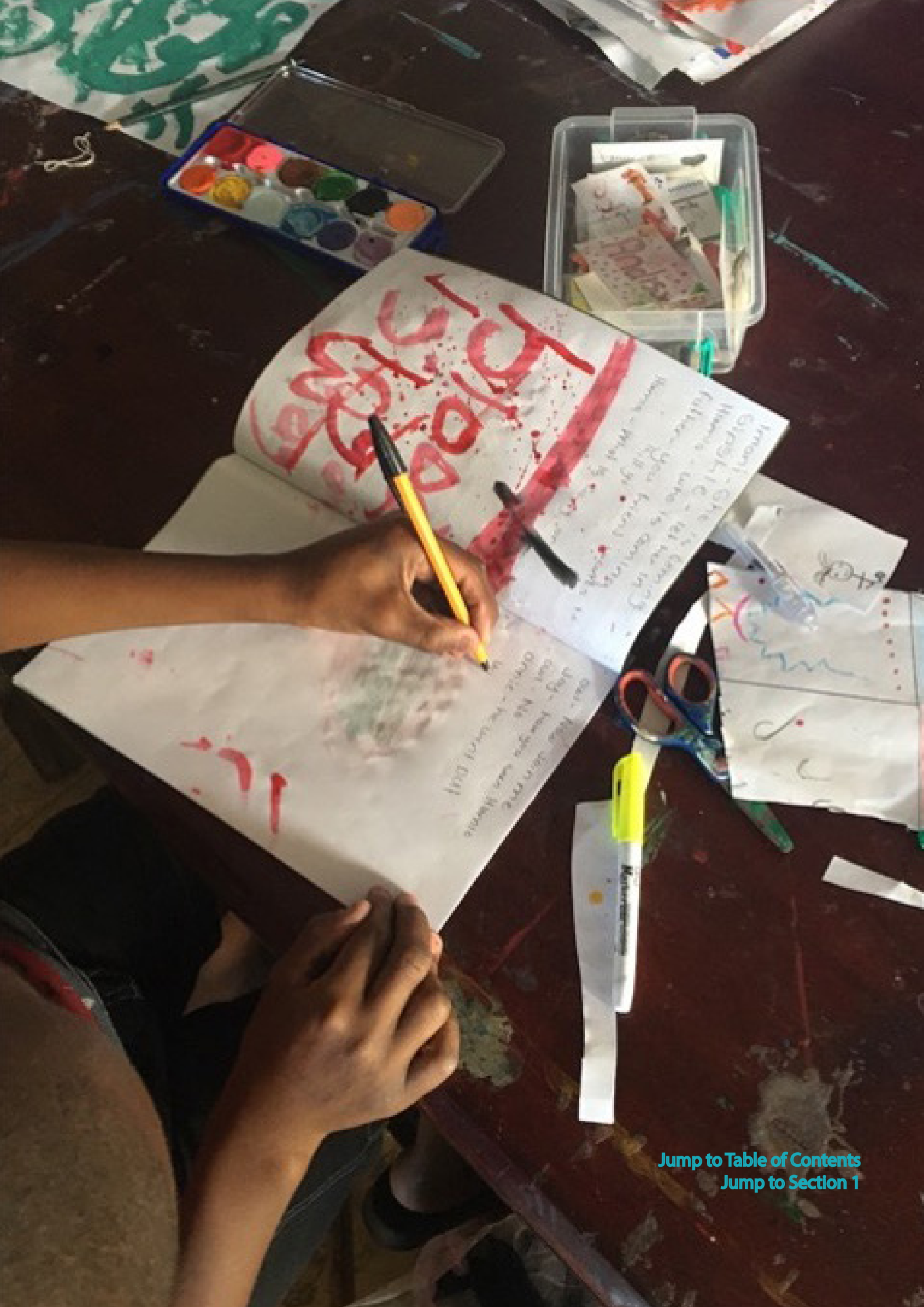
REFLECTIONS

- The co-facilitators modelled a stable family structure for the group, creating a safe space for participants to express themselves.
- Weekly supervision sessions and debriefing after each session.
- Providing participants food before and after the sessions to enable them to play, create and learn.
- The longitudinal nature of the project allowed more time for connection.
- Utilising a variety of methods and materials to meet the individual needs and interests of each participant. Allowing the children to actively co-create.
- Including a collaborative ending ritual for the sessions.
- Tensions with volunteers and interns who were unfamiliar with arts-based methods and more interested in implementing traditional literacy lessons.

LINKED THEMES:

"Safe Space"
"Collaboration"
"Adaptability"
"Power and positionality"

The creation of a group contract
Writing a story



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SECTION 2

EMERGING THEMES

Themes were identified from the presentations and discussions between the UCL and Wits teams, as common denominators to the art-based projects and interventions carried by each of us. These themes are listed below in alphabetical order, and include a small reflection, strengths, challenges and quotes by the team members. The themes described all have common threads including finding voice, agency, belonging, safety, safe-guarding, communication and multimodality.



Adaptability

ADAPTABILITY ENSURES RELEVANCE AND ENGAGEMENT, ALLOWING THE RESEARCH TO RESPOND TO PARTICIPANTS' NEEDS AND PREFERENCES.

Flexibility and spontaneity are crucial in arts-based research. Adapting methods to meet the needs of participants ensures that the research remains relevant and effective.

Arts-based research methods are not one size fits all; there is no right and wrong. It is about testing and refining. Researchers need to think about different possible scenarios and different situations and become experts at picking up those nuances and modifying themselves and changing things as they go.

Being adaptable fosters creativity and innovation, enabling researchers to incorporate spontaneous and culturally relevant discoveries

in impactful ways. Sometimes, spontaneous moments of creativity can outlive the end of a project. For example, in *Partition of Identity*, Iqbal explains that “the name of the exhibition was Adhoori Shanakht, and this means suspended identity, which is something that we came up with together with one of our artists one day on the way to a workshop with the young people. What’s so powerful is that this term ‘Adhoori Shanakht’, has actually now been adopted by the organisation, and they use it in lobbying work and working with the government, reflecting the enduring power of art”.

CHALLENGES

- The adaptability required for arts-based research sometimes means that researchers may not achieve their initially planned or desired outcomes.
- Sometimes, researchers must respond and adapt to forces outside of their or their participants’ control. It can be difficult to include adaptability within the confines of structured academic outputs imposed by committees and funders

“We decide we are going to record because it’s fluid, we understand how to work with children, and we understand how to be sensitive. We feel that we are experts at doing this. We put that on paper to an ethics panel or a funding panel, and the first thing they say is, ‘But how are you going to do that?’. I hope that this toolkit can explain the art-based research process to funders under ethics panels and help them understand this intuitive way of working.”

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“The PANCHEEEL project was planned pre-COVID, as a much bigger showcase around the country. But then COVID hit, so what we had to do then was take these narratives and these stories and create some short films, which we put online so that more people could see them.”



Advocacy

THE NARRATIVES CREATED THROUGH ARTS-BASED RESEARCH CAN SERVE AS POWERFUL TOOLS FOR ADVOCACY.

Sharing stories in creative ways can raise awareness about important issues, challenge stereotypes and stigmas, and influence policy. Arts-based methods are a valuable tool for sharing voice, advocating for participants, and empowering participants to advocate for themselves. Arts-based advocacy can raise awareness and drive social change by allowing participants to express themselves in their own way and thereby challenge stereotypes and

promote understanding of important issues.

Arts-based methods can provide a platform for marginalised communities to influence policy and public perception, contributing to meaningful societal impact. For example, in *Partition of Identity*, Iqbal facilitated workshops in which children wrote letters to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, which “were eventually sent to the Prime Minister, and they became part of an advocacy campaign, raising awareness”.

CHALLENGES

- Balancing advocacy goals with ethical considerations and participants’ comfort requires careful navigation.

“When you write about issues in traditional academic outputs, you can have quotes or statistical data to show trends, but there is nothing as powerful as when you have a person - even if it’s an animation - express themselves in their own voice. As such, arts-based outputs can promote dialogue by communicating complex issues in new and more direct ways.”

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One of the arts-based outputs of Lakhnapaul's project *CHAMPIONS* – a stage play – also reached the government: "After we performed the play, we had a panel discussion with an MP, somebody from the third sector, and ourselves... it was through the play that we then started the campaign that every child should have a cot if they are homeless, and this now has gone into guidance in the UK".

Kiran's letter to the Prime Minister from the Partition of Identity Project

Dear Prime Minister,
Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Assalam-o-alaikum,

My name is Kiran. I am 16 years old. I belong to the Bengali community and my home is in [REDACTED] Karachi. There is a lot of anxiety in our home because my father has an identity issue. I am a student and a gymnast but I can't participate in International (competitions) because my father's identity (card) has been blocked. As a result, I cannot become a good gymnast nor can I find a good job. I would like to request to you to please help us.

I am a champion (gymnast) and I want to progress further. I belong to a poor house. My father earns with a lot of difficulty and sends us to school. No one gives him work because of identity issues. I request you to please help us. Thank you.

Well-wisher
Kiran [REDACTED]
Date: 25/5/2022
[REDACTED]
Karachi

جناب وزیر اعظم
اسلامی جمہوریہ پاکستان اسلام علیکم
میری نام کیرن ہے میں 16 سال کی ہوں

میری نام کیرن ہے میں 16 سال کی ہوں اور میں بنگالی قومیت سے
ہوں۔ میری بہن [REDACTED] کراچی سے ہیں اور ہماری سسٹم میں بہت
پریشانی ہے کیونکہ میرے پاس شناخت کی مثال ہے اور میں
ایک اسٹوڈنٹ ہوں میں جیسا کہ کیرن ہیں اور میں جیسا کہ
میں انٹرنیشنل میں حصہ نہیں لے سکتی کیونکہ میری شناخت
بلوک ہو چکی ہے اور میں ایک اچھا اکیڈمی نہیں بن سکتی ہوں
اور میں ایک اچھا جواب نہیں دے سکتی مجھے کپ سے گزارش ہے
کہ کپ ہماری مدد کرے پلیس اور میں ایک اچھا جاہلین ہوں
پلیس مجھے آگے بڑھنے دے۔ اور میں ایک غریب گھر سے ہوں
میرے آباؤ اجداد مشکل سے کھاتے ہیں اور ہمیں اسکول بھجیت
ہے اور شناخت کہ واجہ سے کوئی نہیں کام آتا ہے کہہتے ہیں
آپ سے گزارش ہے کہ آپ ہماری مدد کرے شکریہ

ضمیران بٹ
نام کیرن
Date: 25/5/2022
[REDACTED]
کراچی



"In MHRI, we used the theatre as a way of sharing knowledge or information about stigma and how people felt stigmatised about mental health."

Co-creation

CO-CREATION CULTIVATES A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT AMONG PARTICIPANTS, STRENGTHENING THEIR ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT TO THE PROJECT AND THE CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE.

Engaging participants in the co-creation of research fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment.

Knowledge is always co-created – maybe not in traditional academia, but in any other kind of setting, so arts-based workshops provide the ideal condition for the co-creation of knowledge, for dialogue.

Participatory methods and co-creation are often the driving factors behind arts-based research projects and their ability to create meaningful change. Lakhanpaul notes in her reflections on *Myths and Moods*, “we realised that we had to engage participants in this process and that going separately and doing our work separately was not going to make change”.

Co-creation enhances the relevance and authenticity of the research by incorporating participants’ perspectives and experiences. Participation is voice in action – not just sharing voice with the public but having it heard throughout the research process. For example, as Shand describes in *Uhambo*, “a child participant arrived and saw that I’d set up a puppet theatre, and he asked what it was, and I said, we’re going to be doing puppet shows today, and I’ve set up the theatre. Then he went about dismantling it and spent the whole session creating the puppet theatre, not really interested in the puppet show. He participated in the end, but his focus was on creating the theatre”.

CHALLENGES

- Ensuring genuine co-creation can be challenging, particularly when dealing with power imbalances or varying levels of engagement.
- Balancing the need for structured research with the flexibility required for co-creation needs careful planning.

“There are multiple ways of doing research, and these ideas often come from the community and the participants themselves by asking them, ‘What would you like? And what do you think is important? How can we engage with you better?’ ”

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“Giving the participants the power, enabling them to create the space, where they sit, making important choices, and so on.”



The puppet theatre was designed by a participant in the Uhambo project.

“We need to remember that we are co-creators and that we do not know more than participants know about what they need to be making...we need to keep that in mind when working with participants, especially children.”

Collaboration

COLLABORATION BRINGS VALUABLE EXPERTISE AND PERSPECTIVES, ENRICHING THE RESEARCH AND ENHANCING ITS OUTCOMES AND VARIETY OF OUTPUTS.

Working with artists, civil society and other collaborators enriches the research process. This partnership brings diverse perspectives, expertise and outcomes, enhancing the quality and impact of the project. Researchers should choose their collaborators carefully, considering how different personalities will work together and work towards the research goals of the project and towards protecting participants.

The team you work with is important because I do not think there should be any egos in the work we do. It is challenging for communities

or participants who have had a tough time in life when we researchers are so privileged. Our participants have amazing voices and amazing stories, and the research should be about amplifying that.

As Iqbal observes, researchers and participants can also learn important skills from collaborators. In putting together a clay-bird-making workshop for *FLOCK*, Iqbal collaborated with an artist named Julie Nelson, highlighting that Nelson “makes these beautiful ceramic birds and she was imparting her skills in bird making, using clay, to the participants”.

“When I run art workshops, sometimes I run them myself, but I also recognise that I am not an artist, and sometimes you can learn from other people, so I often work with community artists or artists from the country that I study in.”

CHALLENGES

- Researchers and collaborators often approach projects with different expectations and backgrounds.
“My experience of working with different artists and documentary filmmakers, etc., is that sometimes you’re speaking completely different languages.”
- Artist collaborators may have different end goals from researchers.
“In some projects, artist collaborators may be more interested in the exhibition at the end, whereas for us, as researchers and also art therapists, it is more about the process.”
- Miscommunication or unclear expectations can lead to misunderstandings and

conflicts, requiring careful management and communication.

- Working with artist collaborators can also give rise to disagreements about ownership and use of outputs.
“There can sometimes be ambiguity in who owns what. There will have to be a whole area around consent ethics and IP around creative arts. Who owns the drawings? Do we own the drawings? Can we do anything with those drawings? Can we put them up in an exhibition? And what consent are we getting in the process for what we’re going to use the material for later on? The ethics of doing the research, the ethics of the output, and the IP”



Artist and FLOCK project-collaborator Julie Nelson showing the group how to go about making a bird with clay.

“Communication is key. A researcher has a completely different approach than an artist, So, I think these things need to be very clear from the beginning in any kind of collaboration to avoid trouble down the line.”

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Consent

INFORMED CONSENT PROTECTS PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS AND ENSURES THEIR COMFORT WITH HOW THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE USED.

Seeking informed consent from participants at every stage of the project establishes trust and respect between researchers and participants, enhancing the quality and authenticity of the research. Ensuring that participants consent to participating and sharing their experiences is vital. This includes obtaining informed consent and respecting participants' decisions about how their stories and images are used.

Obtaining and managing consent can be complex and difficult to document, especially in dynamic projects in the field, with multiple

participants from the community. In *Metropolitan Nomads*, Ripero-Muñiz explains that the researchers informed participants "that we were there doing this project and that we were taking photos, and if anyone didn't want to be photographed, they could say, but it was all verbal consent because it is difficult to go to some places and start getting written consent to everyone in the area".

Researchers should be attentive to structural power dynamics and how these might influence or coerce participants into giving consent.

"Another issue is how vulnerable communities are. You get participants' consent but are they in a position to say no?"



CHALLENGES

- Despite the logistical challenges that it presents, obtaining informed consent is crucial.
- Researchers should ensure that all participants fully understand the implications of their consent, which requires clear and accessible communication.

"We made sure that the kids knew that if they don't want to go there, they don't have to go there; they have absolute agency...nobody needs to go to any place where they don't want to go. Nobody needs to share anything they don't want to share."

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Ethics

ETHICAL PRACTICES IN ARTS-BASED RESEARCH ENSURE THE RESPECTFUL AND RESPONSIBLE TREATMENT OF PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS.

The ethical standards required for arts-based research methods often go above and beyond the standards required for approval by ethics boards.

"There is the ethics of the ethics panel that we have to write and say we will do this, but then there's our own ethical practice."

Ethics panels offer a minimum standard – researchers must be adaptable and diligent in imposing additional standards appropriate for

their arts-based research projects. High ethical standards ensure the respectful representation of participants' stories and experiences, cultivating further trust and authenticity.

Ethical practices protect participants in both the research process and dissemination of findings.

"Researchers need to consider how the output and dissemination will affect participants in their contexts."

"We do not treat the children as if they have a deficit...instead, we treat them as if they have the opposite of deficit – a surplus of knowledge. Researchers should consider that participants have knowledge and that we researchers are not going there and teaching them anything."

CHALLENGES

- Navigating ethical dilemmas can be complex, particularly when working with sensitive topics or vulnerable populations.
- Balancing the need for accurate representation and the need to disseminate information with ethical considerations of participants' wellbeing requires careful attention. Researchers should consider cultural differences and seek consent every time they share information about a participant or use a participant's likeness.

"We decided that we could possibly reflect about that somewhere else, but not here...It might have enriched the project in terms of research knowledge, but in terms of ethics, we decided not to include it."

Healing

ARTS-BASED INTERVENTIONS CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PARTICIPANTS FEEL SAFE TO SHARE AND PROCESS THEIR EXPERIENCES, CONTRIBUTING TO PARTICIPANTS' HEALING AND WELLBEING BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS.

Even if healing might not be the primary objective or motivation behind these interventions, arts-based methods can have a profound impact on participants' healing, particularly for those who are marginalised or have experienced trauma or difficult circumstances. Participants may not have access to counselling therapy, or may not even know what kind of resources exist. These methods create safe spaces for expression, allowing participants to process their emotions and experiences.

Many participants in the projects described here expressed gratitude in their feedback, just by the fact of being heard. This highlights

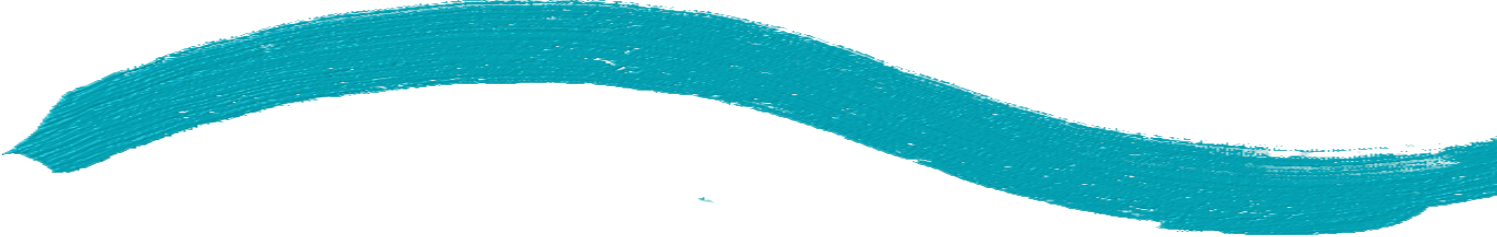
how many of the participants' stories often go unnoticed in everyday life – they don't even talk among themselves about traumatic events. Creating a safe space where their stories can emerge has the potential to heal.

Participating in projects using arts-based methods provides participants with a way of taking their minds off traumatic events just for a moment. Iqbal notes that some of her participants who struggled with PTSD found it very difficult to focus and experienced problems with concentration. The act of creating birds and working with clay in her project *FLOCK* helped the participants to come into the present moment, to focus and to learn a new skill.

CHALLENGES

- Researchers are exposed to difficult topics and stories that can leave lasting impacts.
- Healing and measuring the impact of healing is difficult as it is often subjective and intangible.

“What is very important in these kinds of projects is the healing and researchers have to be very careful how they do that, and especially how they share it. One thing happens during the workshop and another thing is the output.”



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“It’s the material - the art is what is healing.”

Participant from FLOCK making a bird from clay



“Sometimes we try to impose those quantitative paradigms on things that maybe cannot be measured or should not be measured. How do you measure love? You cannot deny it’s there.”

Legacy

THE LEGACY OF ARTS-BASED PROJECTS CAN HAVE POSITIVE, LONG-TERM IMPACTS ON INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.

The impact of arts-based projects extends beyond their immediate outcomes. Participants carry the emotional and psychological benefits with them, and the outputs often leave a lasting impression on the community. Researchers and facilitators should be mindful and ethical of the outcomes of projects and how and where they are going to be shared. Arts-based research projects often grow beyond their initial scope.

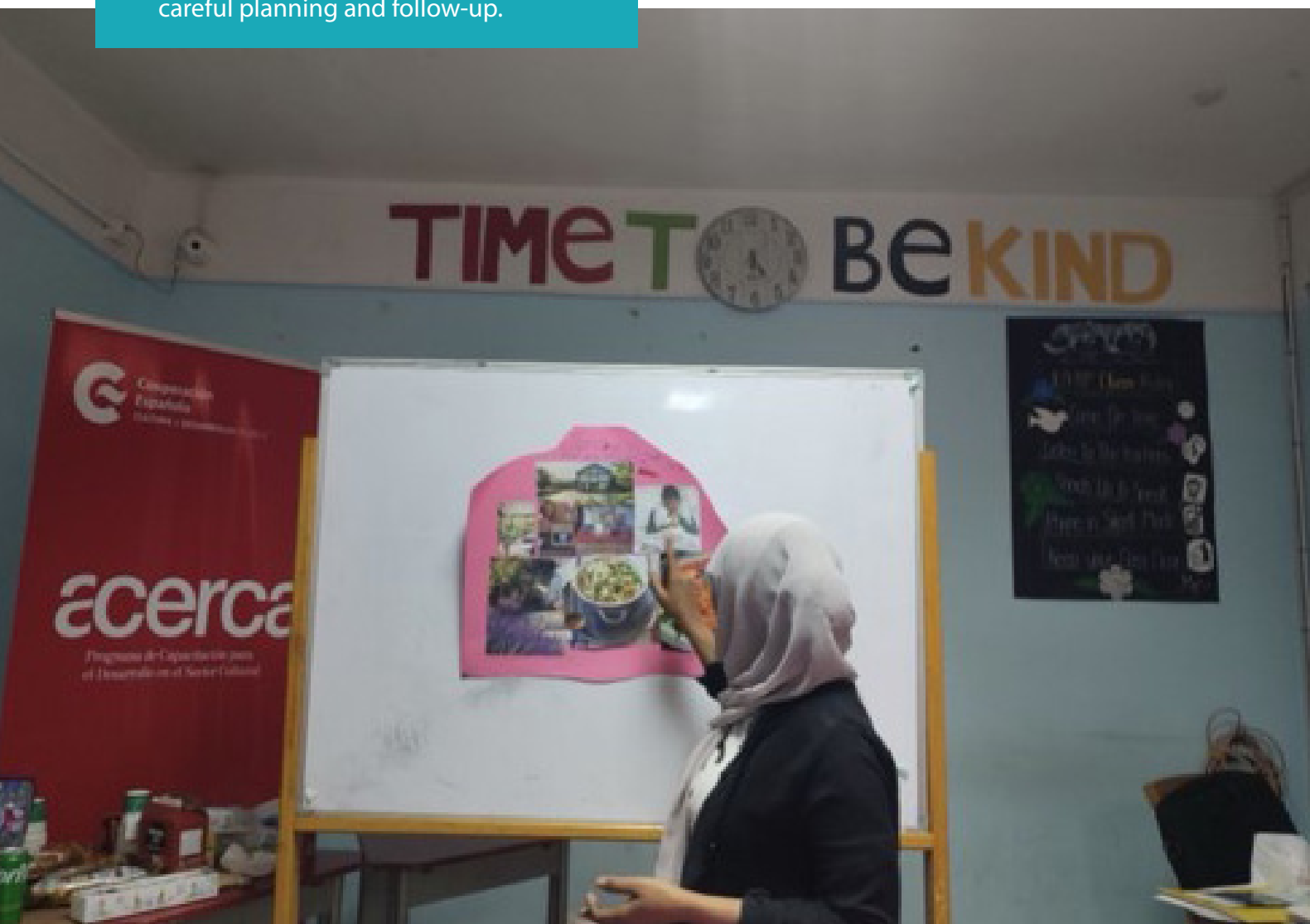
CHALLENGES

- Ensuring that the project's ending and legacy are positive and respectful of participants' contributions requires careful planning and follow-up.

“Like a seed...these interventions start something, but participants can keep creating on their own.”

Projects like Ripero-Muñiz's *Constructing and Deconstructing Identities* that involve 'training trainers' have the added benefit of planting seeds. When the researchers leave, the new trainers can reproduce – if not the same, then at least some activities or an adaptation of them – new projects involving new participants.

Workshop participant presenting a collage about her dream life from Constructing and Deconstructing Identities.



Power and positionality

ENSURING PARTICIPANTS HAVE CONTROL OVER THEIR NARRATIVES FOSTERS TRUST AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE RESEARCH.

Respecting the cultures, communities and participants involved in arts-based research is crucial for ethical research practices. Navigating the position of the researcher involves recognising and addressing power imbalances and ensuring participants have control over their narratives through participatory co-creation.

Recognising and addressing power imbalances empowers participants and respects their cultural contexts. It is important to consider positionality by advising that the group you're working with comes first because they have the most to lose. Therefore it is crucial to be very careful around power and position

“To dilute the power imbalance between researcher and participant as much as possible; researchers need to be as human as possible.”

CHALLENGES

- Navigating power dynamics in research can be challenging and requires sensitivity and awareness from researchers.
- Mitigating the power imbalance between researchers and participants through dialogue and sharing helps to generate trust and openness.

“Give participants something to take away...encourage them to take something, so it's not just that you've extracted and then suddenly disappear without anything. Give participants the booklet, give them something to take away so that the end of the project is not a hard cut-off.”

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Researcher wellbeing

PRIORITISING THE WELLBEING OF BOTH THE RESEARCHERS AND THE PARTICIPANTS CULTIVATES A HEALTHY RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT.

Ensuring the wellbeing of researchers is essential for ethical capacity-building in arts-based research. Researchers often become intensely involved in arts-based research projects, which can leave significant and enduring emotional impacts. This aspect of research is often overlooked – for both the participants and the researchers.

Strategies for protecting researcher wellbeing also ensures that researchers are equipped to handle the emotional and ethical complexities of arts-based research, supporting their professional development and resilience, using the lived experience gained of doing this work that contributes to overall capacity-building.

CHALLENGES

- The emotional aspect of working with vulnerable or trauma-affected participants can be challenging for researchers.
- Researchers often form powerful emotional connections with collaborators and participants, who they then usually have to leave when the project ends.

Creating response art is a creative way for researchers to practice self-reflection and self-care



“We work deeply when we use arts-based approaches, which will be deep work if done properly. Attachment leads to getting to know people, connecting and developing relationships.”

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Safe Space

SAFE SPACES ENABLE PARTICIPANTS TO ENGAGE IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS WITHOUT FEAR OF JUDGMENT OR HARM.

Creating a safe space is essential for effective arts-based research, allowing participants to express themselves freely and authentically. Creating safe spaces for participants can cultivate emotional healing and wellbeing by providing a supportive environment for expression. Safe spaces in arts-

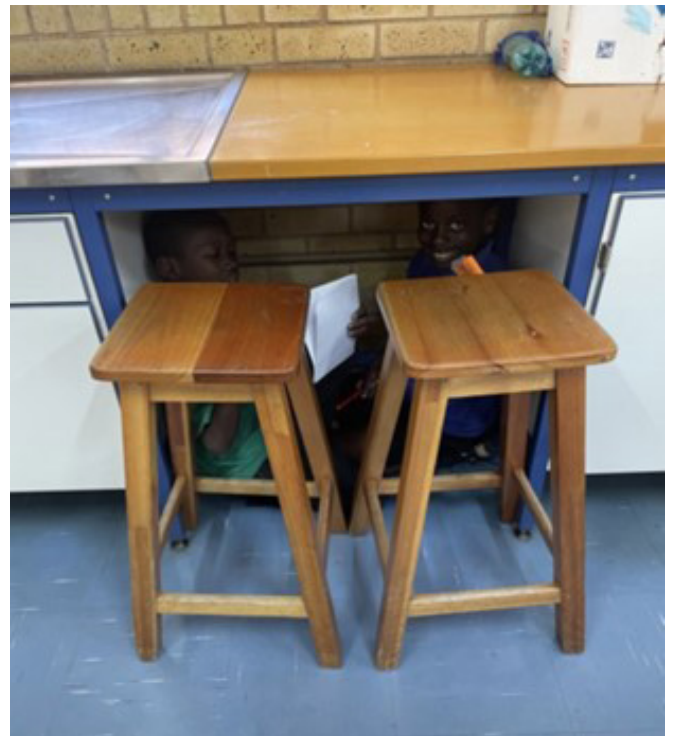
based methods can help to establish a sense of belonging among participants by creating a shared space for expression and interaction. Safe spaces include how participants are spoken to, treated and engaged with.

Belonging is relational, it is cultural and symbolic, it is embodied and includes time and it's a fundamental human motivator tied to notions of identity.

CHALLENGES

- Ensuring that all participants feel safe and supported can be challenging, particularly when building initial trust in diverse or trauma-affected groups.
- Maintaining a safe space requires ongoing effort and sensitivity from facilitators. Disruptions, such as external factors or people walking in the workshop space may interrupt the structure and security of safe-space-building.

Participants in The Meaning of Home workshop creating an extra-safe space for themselves



“Having co-facilitators was really great, being able to model the parental couple, where the group almost became like a family, the psychoanalytic frame, and its containing function, creat[ed] a ‘good enough’ safe space.”

Trust-building

WHEN THERE IS TRUST, A SAFE SPACE IS CREATED WHERE PARTICIPANTS CAN FEEL VALUED AND RESPECTED

Building trust is essential for participants to feel comfortable, to open up and share their stories. It enables participants to share deeply personal and sometimes traumatic experiences. This contributes significantly to their emotional healing and sense of belonging. Trust also enhances the quality and depth of the process and the outputs as participants are more likely to engage. This process takes time and requires consistent effort from researchers and facilitators

to create a safe and supportive environment.

Participants may initially feel mistrustful or hesitant of researchers, especially if the researcher or facilitator is from outside the community. For example in the project, *Metropolitan Nomads*, it took a while to gain that trust, and for people to open up, allowing themselves to be photographed. It required constant explanations about where the photos were going to be used and ongoing assent from participants.

CHALLENGES

- Maintaining trust throughout the project, especially when dealing with sensitive topics, requires ongoing engagement and careful ethical considerations.
- Building trust requires significant time and consistent effort, which can be challenging in short-term projects.

“It’s a matter of people getting used to you and getting to know you. And for me, that’s very important. The moment you have a concrete interaction, things start to change.”

A participant from the project Metropolitan Nomads, in the coffee shop-museum that he owns and runs in Mayfair, Johannesburg





SECTION 3

TOOLS FOR BEST PRACTICE

In this final section we share some of the lessons learnt by each team member during the design, implementation and dissemination of arts-based projects and interventions that we found to have in common during our discussions. We believe these considerations will be useful to take into account for researchers and practitioners embarking on future arts-based projects.



CARING FOR PARTICIPANTS

Given the affective nature of arts based practice, art can bring up deep emotions in individuals. Addressing such deeply rooted trauma requires sensitive facilitation and a careful balance between providing emotional safety and ethical practices in sharing participants' narratives.

Provide ongoing support and resources for participants during and after the project, such as access to information online and counselling support is important

MEASURING IMPACT

There are two tangible ways, beyond the subjective element of healing, to consider when measuring the impact of arts-based work. One is about reach – how many people have you reached and how many audiences have we reached with what you've done? The other is about what change you have made.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE

Prioritise relationship-building activities from the onset, such as spending time in the community and engaging with participants in non-research settings. For example, in the PANCHSHEEL project, Lakhanpaul found that it was also important for her to be embedded in the community, so she spent some time going through the villages, talking to people who could speak Hindi and understanding from them how they could set up the project, which also contributed to the co-creation of the research design and outputs.

Ensure clear, honest, and transparent communication about the research aims, processes, and how the data will be used to help participants feel informed and respected.

Involve trusted local facilitators or community members who can act as intermediaries, helping to bridge cultural gaps and build relationships.

Document and disseminate the project's outcomes in a way that honours and respects participants' contributions, ensuring their trust in the researcher and the research process is preserved.

Consider establishing clear guidelines and boundaries for interactions within the project by creating a group contract with participants, as Shand did in Uhambo.

LOOKING AFTER THE RESEARCHERS

Researchers should build time for reflection and debriefing into their research design.

Researchers should seek guidance and mentorship from other arts-based researchers. It is important to have somebody on your team who is an expert at doing this. New researchers should consider working with experienced researchers who know how to do the work and when to do it (when to stop and when to start). Even experienced researchers should connect and debrief with colleagues when they face challenges in their own research.

Researchers may also seek out counselling or therapy when they encounter challenging subject matter in their research projects. Within the budget for grants, researchers can assign some funds towards this to ensure researcher wellbeing.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Give participants a sense of closure as the project comes to an end. For example, include an ending ritual co-created with the participants.

Provide participants with tangible outputs, such as storybooks, photobooks, or artworks, that they can keep and share with others. For example, in PANCHSHEEL, Lakhanpaul produced physical books and left these with [participants] so they could actually see their pictures and use it as a tool of pride, but also as a learning tool.

Consider staying in contact with participants from previously completed projects.

Building an appropriate legacy requires clear communication from the start to ensure participants are aware of the outcomes and the aftermath of the project before they agree to participate. The researcher should continue to clearly communicate what the participants can expect to emerge from the project throughout the project, as outcomes might change as the researcher and participants adapt to new challenges.

BEING MINDFUL OF POWER AND POSITION

Researchers should be mindful of their positionality. Mindfulness requires 'awareness' of the researcher's identity and the identities of participants.

The researcher must critically consider that question 'who am I for the participants?'. The notion of power dynamics goes beyond the personal or cultural identity of the researcher and includes the researcher's institutional position.

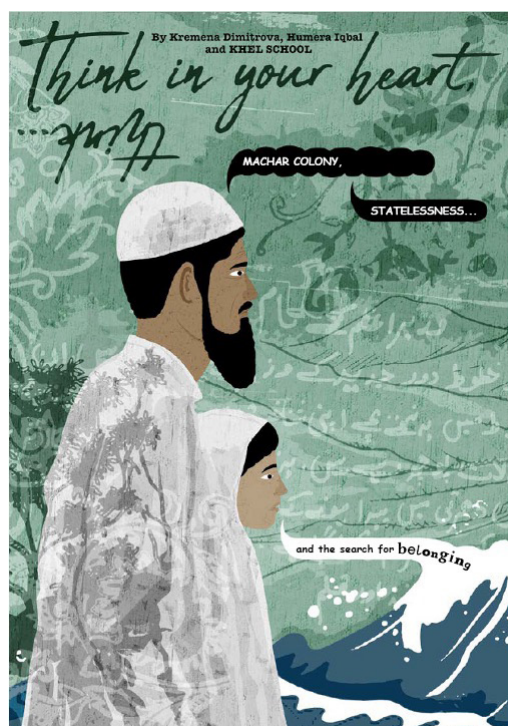
A researcher approaching participants with the backing of a large institution should take the privilege and power of that position into consideration.

Researchers should actively work to involve participants in decision-making processes through co-creation.

Researchers should build trust with participants and community members involved.

It is important to give participants something to take away with them. This ensures that the researcher has not just extracted what they need and then suddenly disappears without giving anything in return. You can give participants a booklet or something to take away so that the end of the project is not a hard cut-off.

Involve local facilitators or community leaders to help navigate cultural contexts and build rapport with participants.



'Think in your heart... think,' a comic book highlighting the issue of Statelessness from the Partition of Identity Project.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS

Establish clear guidelines and protocols for obtaining informed consent and ensuring ethical representation.

Respect participants' cultures in the research process through collaboration, co-creation and trust-building. Adapt to the needs of participants where applicable:

Working with a translator: If a researcher does not speak the same language or dialect as the participants, they should work with a translator. For example, Lakhanpaul reflected on a dialectal language barrier that she experienced in PANCHSHEEL that arose "even though [she] speaks Hindi" because "the tribal communities have their own local language, which even the people in Rajasthan don't always speak." Overcoming this barrier required the help of a translator.

Supporting cultural requests: In PANCHSHEEL, Lakhanpaul says "We also had to consider gender mix as well. There were some occasions where the women particularly wanted to have their focus groups totally separate from the men, and that had to be supported".

Adapt methods when necessary. Ripero-Muñiz notes that, in collecting data for *Constructing and Deconstructing Identities*, she had to adapt her method to better accommodate oral, rather than the written word because “there were stories, but they were oral stories... the participants have a long history of oral traditions, so that took over.”

Engage in continuous ethical reflections and communication with participants throughout the project, being responsive to any emerging concerns or dilemmas.

Researchers should think carefully about how they represent or depict participants.

Reflecting on *Myths and Moods*, Lakhanpaul was “quite worried about depicting the participants because we thought that the community might feel that we were criticising them, but they loved the film because we also mixed it in with showcasing the beauty of Rajasthan. We tried to use it as a positive way of demonstrating how some of these rituals and beliefs are fundamental to the relationship building within the community themselves, but also for their own mental health”.

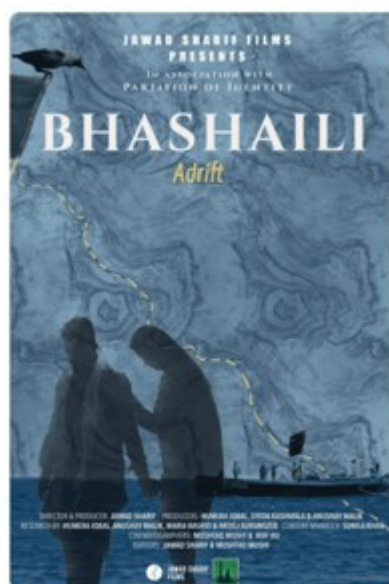
Similarly, with *Toilet Tales*, Lakhanpaul “wanted to think of a little bit more of a lighthearted way to share what was happening with the public and the community who are receiving and using government funds” that would avoid “coming across in a negative way

either to the government or to the community themselves”.

Lakhanpaul also notes that with *CHAMPIONS*, she “wanted to raise awareness about families living in homelessness, but in a way that’s not stigmatising them and gives them bad press, so we had to think very carefully how we were going to do that”.

Researchers should consider omitting or carefully framing information shared by participants that could negatively impact community members if disseminated. Researchers need to use their judgement as to what to release as research data even if it’s powerful research data. In certain instances, it’s just not ethical to release because it could, for example, harm the child and their relationships. Sometimes, adhering to these ethical considerations will require the researcher to compromise on other aspects of the project: Researchers should make dissemination accessible to participants.

Researchers must discuss protocols to safeguard participants, particularly when working with vulnerable populations. Iqbal recalls working with vulnerable groups in *Partition of Identity* and engaging in “discussions around ethics and whether we could even use some of the videos we created. We had to think about whose face could be used, and about getting permission from participants - that was all very important”.



*Bhashaili (Adrift):
A feature length
documentary from the
Partition of Identity
Project*

GETTING CONSENT

Provide clear, honest, and transparent information about the research aims, processes, and how the data will be used, with participants and the parents of child participants.

Use diverse and accessible methods to obtain and document consent, ensuring all participants understand and agree to their involvement.

Allow participants to participate to the extent they are comfortable and check in with them to reaffirm consent and respect any changes in their willingness to participate. Participants can revoke consent for any aspect of the project or for the inclusion of anything they have produced during the project at any time.

CO-CREATING A PROJECT

Researchers should build trust with participants and continuously involve them in the research process.

Being adaptable to the ideas of participants allows the research method to be co-created. Participants might engage with different or unexpected creative aspects of the project

Give participants agency throughout the research process.

Facilitate inclusive and participatory decision-making processes, allowing participants to shape the direction and outcomes of the project.

When working with young participants, involve the families of the children in the process where possible. For example, in *The Meaning of Home*, a project involving young participants, “we knew we were going to do an activity with the kids, and we bought clay, and because we had the parents there, we invited them to create with their children. It was a spontaneous decision that ended up being very effective. It ended up feeling like we were celebrating something” notes Shand.



Parents and children came together spontaneously and unexpectedly, and created a celebration in the *The Meaning of Home* project

THE IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBILITY

Consider the research goals as your endpoint, with multiple possible pathways to reach that goal. Try to work backwards – what’s our goal? Who’s our audience? And then, therefore, which approach would work best?

Researchers should try to incorporate both structure and flexibility into the project design, allowing for spontaneous activities to enrich the research and contribute to co-creation. Despite the initial plan or structure, researchers are also open to adapting and including participants’ suggestions throughout the process. For example, in *Everyday Mayfair* Ripero-Muñiz says “the singing was not planned, but it kind of happened, and we welcomed it”.

Researchers should be prepared to improvise and adapt to new situations and input from participants. Don’t be scared of improvisation. There does not always have to be a script. Shand reflects on a moment in their workshop when Ripero-Muñiz “had a lovely moment of improvisation. The kids responded to the materials and just wanted to dive in and grab everything all at once in that sense that they were not going to get what they needed – of deprivation, wanting to grab everything. [Ripero-Muñiz] had this brilliant idea of creating a shop, and it transformed that experience completely.”

Remain open to participant feedback and be willing to adjust methods and activities as needed, ensuring the project remains participant-centred. For example, in *CHAMPIONS*, Lakhanpaul adjusted her methods to meet the needs of her participants: “They were like, this is my private space, and I feel horrible about my home because I’m in temporary accommodation. I don’t want to share that with you. It triggers me. So, then we said, okay, bring anything from home, whether it’s a teddy bear, or cup, anything that’s from your home that we can then centre the conversation around it, or anything positive if that works better.” Similarly, Lakhanpaul’s project, *SPROCKET*, “was meant to be an event

for children with complex needs. And we were going to move the adults into a different room and say, okay, this is a children’s space, and you can move into a different room. We’ll do your space. And what we realised within the first five minutes was that that’s not what anybody wanted. They wanted to be together. They wanted to be with their parents because they wanted to feel supported by their parents. It was much more beautiful because the mom was so excited about her creative output. She couldn’t help herself; she was loving it”.

WHAT TO THINK ABOUT WHEN COLLABORATING

Establish clear agreements and shared goals at the outset, ensuring all collaborators understand their roles and responsibilities. Researchers collaborating with artists must understand interdisciplinarity and different approaches and work towards goal alignment by having conversations about the purpose of the project.

Maintain regular communication throughout the project, allowing for ongoing dialogue and adjustments as needed.

ARTS-BASED RESEARCH AS ADVOCACY

Involve participants directly in advocacy efforts, ensuring their voices and perspectives are central to the campaigns.

Use diverse and creative methods for advocacy, such as exhibitions, films, and public performances, to reach a broad audience and maximise impact.

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Uhambo's multimodal journey including painting, paper mache, puppet shows, clay work, dressing up, bookbinding and story writing.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SETTING UP AN ARTS-BASED RESEARCH PROJECT

Researchers should integrate theory when designing arts-based methods. Integrating theoretical frameworks provides a solid foundation for methodology and ensures the research is grounded in academic frameworks to understand how complex ideas are created, and knowledge and values form around these ideas throughout the research process.

Researchers should also build methodologies into their projects. It's very important that methodologies are built into the study, and it's not an afterthought. Arts-based methods are part of the research toolkit, and should be approached in the same way. Sometimes, if you have a range of things, you can really understand an issue in a better way. But it's not that one is needed, and the other is not.

Researchers should consider using a multimodal method that combines arts-based methods with traditional methods, as well as including multiple arts-based approaches within a project to meet the needs of each participant.

For example, in *Child Language Brokering*, Crafter and Iqbal had "a range of different things that we did. One thing about arts-based research is that I often pair it with more traditional methods. So, of course, we had surveys and we had vignette-based interviews, and case studies. But then we also supplemented this with other things, ethnography and drama role play workshops and arts workshops." As Shand shares:

"That's what's so wonderful about multimodality. For one of the kids, it was about writing. For another, it was about making".

Researchers should thus consider integrating a variety of arts-based and participatory methods, as listed below, to best meet the needs, skills and interests of participants:

Artist-facilitated co-creation, resulting in:

- Animations
- Comic books
- Films
- Plays
- Bookmaking
- Ceramic-making
- Collage-making
- Drawing and painting
- Creating lifelines
- Creating migration maps
- Using a mirror for reflection
- Creating neighbourhood maps
- Performance
- Photography
- Photo-book-making
- Poster-making
- Playing with play-Doh
- Hosting public workshops
- Reflection
- Singing
- Creating strings of beads
- Creating support tree
- Synallactic collective image technique (S.C.I.T.)

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TEAM BIOS

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Kate Shand has a Master's in Art Therapy from the University of Johannesburg. Her research and practice focuses on the intersection of art therapy, multimodal pedagogies and storytelling to support the emotional wellbeing and literacy of migrant children from Johannesburg's inner city. Shand has a special interest in group art therapy work and has facilitated many arts-based workshops over the years. She is a research associate at the University of the Witwatersrand and teaches part-time on the Art Therapy programme at the University of Johannesburg.

Dr. Humera Iqbal is Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Psychology at the UCL Social Research Institute, University College London. Her research centres on the identity, historical and lived experiences of migrant and minority families, children and young people. This includes citizenship experiences and statelessness, social representations, and social activism. Another strand of her research interrogates the influence of culture, nature and the arts on wellbeing and belonging. Humera uses mixed methods, arts and film-based methods in her research.

Professor Monica Lakhanpaul graduated from Medicine in 1992. She trained in paediatrics, gained her doctorate in Paediatrics and Child Health in 2003. In 2012 Professor Lakhanpaul joined the UCL GOS Institute of Child Health as Professor of Integrated Community Child Health. In 2016 she was appointed Head of Population, Policy and Practice. She now leads a multi-disciplinary translational research group that focuses on Health Services Research, which has had a direct impact on health policy and clinical practice. Her research program aims to translate evidence into clinical practice and health policy; bringing together primary, community and hospital care, social care, education and primary and secondary research.



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