



# ArtWorks Cymru

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## Artist case study report.

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## Summary

Artists known for undertaking good quality participatory art projects were invited to complete an informal, semi-structured, interview. The case studies enable ArtWorks Cymru to develop a deeper insight into some of the participatory work that is taking place in Wales. Artists from different art forms were invited to take part in the case studies to enable the research to look at the diversity of practice. All interviews took place between October 2011 and January 2012; all were audio recorded and/or filmed, and lasted between 20 minutes and 1 hour 30 minutes. The interviews shown here are edited extracts taken from transcripts of each conversation.

## Key Findings

- There is variation in how artists approach participatory projects, and context is very important in determining this.
- Although there is great variety in approach, artists across art forms believe that similar skills are required to undertake participative work.
- Interpersonal skills are thought to be the most important skills. While these skills can be improved, many don't think that they can be learnt.
- The best way to learn skills and develop participative practice is by 'doing' it.
- Apprenticeships and mentoring are frequently mentioned as good methods of training.
- Artists think it is important to keep learning.
- Artists want participants to feel ownership of, and empowerment through, projects.
- Participatory artists are often motivated to meet people. They also hope to see some sort of impact on their participants.
- Both the process and the product are seen as important to participatory arts projects. The emphasis varies depending on the project and the context.
- Artists find it difficult to communicate what 'quality' is. Artists respond that a 'quality' project will be inclusive, and take the participants on a journey. Artists know this is working because the project will have energy.
- Reactions to a kite mark are mixed. Whilst some artists were not against the development of a kite mark, there is unease about how this would be implemented, and who would be implementing it.
- Most artists would welcome an online network, but are concerned as to what exactly it would deliver.

## Extracts from interview with Cai Tomos; dance artist, choreographer, and community dance artist.

### Summary

Cai Tomos feels that his participative work is a significant part of his practice. Cai's participatory practice is centred on the opportunity to work with people. Cai believes that developing skills for participatory work requires support from organisations/individuals that can help an artist develop their craft.

### Motivation:

Cai: I guess I'm interested in people. **People centred work feels really important** to me. Um, I guess more and more recently [I've] become more interested in, perhaps, not just what the art is doing but about the relationship that happens as a kind of bi-product of us working through a particular art medium, which is for me at the moment, the most fascinating bit of it.

Researcher: Why is that relationship important?

Cai: Because it feels, that relationship feels, um, incredibly real, I guess. And sometimes, a part of, maybe a difficulty, sometimes, with theatre is that sometimes it hasn't felt as real as sometimes I've wanted it to feel. And working in the community context certainly gives me some of that realness, perhaps, back.

### Key Skills and beliefs

Cai: [It's] about **tailoring the work to the specific context** and being able to read, I guess, the group that you're working with. That feels really important to wherever I am going; that I bear in mind the context of that community- language, people, culture - and that shapes where I meet them, meet people in the work. So **it's not about coming to the work with an agenda**. It's actually the opposite. It's about, it's about meeting whatever's there, I think as opposed to coming to something that's too fixed. It's to be more, more, fluid in how I work.

### Developing skills

Cai: I think learning that skill of working well, certainly in a community context, is about practise! It feels that it is about **being able to tailor yourself**, your skills, to meet the different needs of different people. It means that you really have to work on the range that you have in terms of what you can offer people of all ages; and you only get that through really being able to play along the scale of the ages, and people, and um, diverse people, so that you don't pin yourself into one particular area.

Cai: I think learning the skills to work in that particular way, is through both **being in the deep end**, and through being able **to have some sort of apprenticeship**. It feels really important to be able to be under the wing of someone else, or an organisation, that can support you while you make those - I'm not going to call them mistakes, but while you make those - those kind of errors of how you work with a group, so that you learn your craft, and it *is* a craft, and you learn your craft in relationship to other people who have been doing it for years. But also that you have a chance of really practically trying out skills. It does feel like something that needs work, and constant kind of, constant refining.

### Product or process?

Cai: Process or product feels like such a loaded question, um, which is fantastic because I've always grappled with it, and with the idea of quality as well. Um, **it's both**. It feels, certainly, it's both. In some particular projects, like the one I'm working on at the moment, the process feels really important; the relationship feels really important, and actually, the art that we do is a bi-product of the relationship somehow. We just happen to be dancing. It's actually about how we meet as humans, how we meet as people. And I think it **varies to the context that you work in**,

it varies with the groups that you work in, where is the emphasis - is it on the product more, or on the process more - and **I think that shifts**, but both of course have importance and have meaning, but for me, **at the moment, I guess I'm more interested in process.**

Researcher: Do you get to decide, as an artist, whether the process or product is more important? Or is it already decided?

Cai: It feels that it's **largely already decided**. But I think, maybe within that, it shifts back and forth. It would be easy to say it's this, or it's this, but actually it feels that **it certainly is both.**

### Quality

Cai: How I'm thinking about it today is that it constitutes **some kind of journey for the participant**. That it constitutes some kind of beginning, middle, and end; and through that process there is some sort of process of transformation through the art; **personal transformation through the art**. Um, that constitutes quality; whether that is visible or not on the outside is very difficult to judge.

Researcher: So, if it's not necessarily visible, how do you know for yourself whether it's going well?

Cai: You know for yourself whether quality's been achieved by **what the participant discloses** or talks about. How you see, perhaps, how the art has made a little shift in that person, and the process of growth, both personally and artistically.

You can't have a forcing of something that I want to happen. With the older people group, when we've been sitting in a circle, doing our exercises, I feel **like I just get out the way**. They just take over and they fly with what's there. And it's so lovely when it happens. It's exactly what it should be.

### Kite Mark

Cai: You learn your skills through such a wide variety of different places, and to formalise that could possibly take something away? Because it is a craft. I guess you learn from so many different people, you pick up this information from such a variety of places. It's so not linear.

### Communication

Cai: Maybe what would be more useful [than an on-line network] is **communication between the separate parts**, maybe? Y' know how sometimes community dance can be over here, and more 'professional' performance work can be over here; and it's between those areas that I feel that there could be more communication. I feel that, certainly as a dance artist I feel that, it's really important that I that I visit all those different places within my arts practice so it's not separate. My performance work is not separate in one way from my work with a group. They inform each other.

### Artists need to be able to take risks.

Cai: It was a real experience to not be seen by the same people that you'd normally get seen by, and still to make it work in that context, and still have that level of feedback, and it was amazing! It really flopped in some places, dramatically, and really worked in others. I think it was a really good thing to do, to experience. But when it did flop, it felt like it flopped dramatically. But I think it's part of being an artist; you have to do that. You have to risk that, otherwise there's no point making work.

## Extracts from interview with anonymous artist; singer, song writer and creative writer.

### Summary

This artist has been undertaking participatory projects for many years and has developed a wide range of work, including delivering participative projects and delivering training. For this artist, there is no real distinction between the process and the product; they are both part of the same journey. This artist would like to see more artists sharing their practice through conferences and events.

### Motivation

Artist: I'm telling you **I live and breathe it** [participatory arts]- there isn't really a moment in my life when I'm not either thinking about it or doing it, y' know, even when I'm asleep. That's quite sad really! I have a book by the bed in case something comes into my head so I can write it down when I wake up. So I live and breathe it, I live and breathe it as a whole; so as an artist really, and I think being a community artist is integral to that.

### Product or process?

Artist: **Why should they be two different things?** Because a journey has a beginning, a middle, and an end, doesn't it? It's a transition point. It's a roundabout, isn't it, where you're going to go off on, on different ways. It's kind of not an end it's a new beginning; which is why we're having a book and cd *launch* [for a recent project]. We're not having an *end* event. We're launching for whatever you're going to do next. I think it's important, especially if you're directing a big community production, to think about the **legacy** of that project and have some sort of framework there.

Personally for me it's the journey. Professionally, if you want people to engage in that journey it's: at the beginning of the rainbow, they're more likely to want to cross the rainbow to have a look at the pot of gold at the end. And **the event can be something to work towards** at the end; and that can be a big thing, or a very small thing. So, it really, really, *really* **depends on the project**. I think whatever your outcome is going to be, I think, it needs to **support the community**. So the outcome is of the best quality that it can be, for them.

### Kite marking

Artist: I mean, it would be **very nice, wouldn't it, to be recognised?** I know people who have worked for 30 years and still can't quite get it, and I've known some people who have come out of college and just, they just, know [clicks fingers]. They- it's just in them. So **how do you kite mark**, y' know, how can you kite mark that? And what kind of **ill ease** is that going to make within the arts community, y' know?

I *do* think it's quite important to make sure people understand the basics, but, erm, it would be quite nice to **have a bi-annual sharing and recognition**. Y' know, where we could go along and look at each other's stuff, 'cause it's quite isolating. Although I said to you earlier about collaborating, that's because that's the way I work, but I don't know what people are doing in Scotland, or France, or ... Well, I do know 'cause I make it my point to know, but what I'm saying is, if you were just coming out of college, how would you know? How would you know who to contact, what to do?

### Key skills and beliefs

Artist: [Artists need] a basic understanding of what **inclusion, participation, empowerment, community, longevity**- what those principles at the core of participation - actually are. That would be easy in terms of training new people wouldn't it? 'Cause if you were putting on a course, or something, great. But actually for ensuring that people who are out there already

doing it have those, I suppose, the proof of the pudding is in the eating: I've never stopped working, and most of my clients that I work with are people I've worked with for a long time.

### Developing skills

Artist: You could put on a **training course**, in fact I *have*: Art training for trainers. We had funding from ACW for that. And did a partner project with a special needs school, and trained nearly 60 members of staff in OCN level 2 and 3 in art training. And that was *really* learning how to be a facilitator: How *do* you get people to join in? And then we had a further grant and we took a much smaller number, I think it was 10 people from that 60, and we trained them to train the trainers, so that I could be replaced. So that had 10 people who could run the arts training for trainers course. And that was brilliant, and that was 10 years ago, and as a result they've got all sorts happening.

I make a point of going to different people's workshops, just to see, to get that experience. But I didn't, I haven't always done that, that's quite a recent. I haven't had the time! To be honest you don't get the time just to go and **see what someone else is doing** [laughs]!! Because you're either applying for funding, trying to get partnerships, er, getting people on board with the project, delivering the project, evaluating the project, writing the after report, communicating through blogs and Facebook to the world, updating your website, and, ooh, maybe even writing your own stuff sometimes! And, and, performing your own work!

I went to a youth fellowship in the local church and I joined a drama club, and that's how I managed to gain access to the theatre group and everything. And there was one man in there who set up a committee - Well, he said right, shall we have a committee so you can all decide what you're gonna do? And we were like 12, y' know. And we were like, "yeah ok then". So I joined it, and I was on the committee for almost all my teens. So, that is literally who I am, because of that experience, y' know. So you *can* learn. That's where I learnt; through my **life experience**. You can informally learn things that set you up for life. People can say one line to you; that's the other thing, is, be careful what you say, be careful how you treat people, and what you say to people.

### Networking

Artist: I would join it, but for me personally it would be nice, because we're so doing our own thing, almost; how great to physically, **actually, meet each other!** It would be nice to see faces, and *visit*, and go and *see*. I just think it would be great to have, y' know, a bi-annual thing - I understand it would be difficult to organise annually, and people can't always afford to come! - But where people are sharing the kinds of things that you said about, and, more besides.

### Quality

Artist: It is about **journey**. It is being aware that you're moving somewhere else with this. The outcome is [also] of the **best quality that it can be**. So, if I show you some of the books; the end thing is not lots of paper stapled together, or ring-bound, it is actually a proper, professional, book. 'Cause, how exciting to be in a book, y' know, that looks like a book, and have a book launch, and be part of that. So, I think if you're going to have an end event, my personal feeling is, that it's important that that event will **have meaning** and be of quality for those people that have taken part.

I don't mention the word quality [to participants], because very often people say "I'm not good enough". People have got a big downer on themselves, so then somebody like me comes along and says "right, we're going to paint how we feel today" y' know, 'cause that's one of my baselines; getting an idea of how people use the space. 'Cause if you give them a big canvas, some people will just paint in the corner, and, y' know, that's telling you a lot about, spatially where they're at. They might feel differently the next day. And they're like "Oh, oh, I couldn't, I'll ruin your canvas", "it's not my canvas, it's yours"; "it's a waste of your paints", "it's not my paint

it's yours". And at the end "Wasn't it good fun!!". And they haven't painted - they might be 60 and they haven't painted - since they were 12, or 15.

And there's an age group as well, who wouldn't even *entertain* music technology because they didn't have a computer in school. We didn't have computers in school. Mate, when I was in school I thought I was big 'cause I had a digital watch, y' know[laughs]! And, taking music technology in to the old people's homes here, and they were like, "Ooh, no, dear. No dear." But actually, so blown away that they'd actually composed a piece of music so quickly on a computer. So it is about giving people choice, but it's **informed choice**. If you only give people what they choose, they will only choose from within their life experience. So you almost have to give them lots of choices so they know what to choose.

## Extracts from interview with Kate Woolveridge; vocal animateur

### Summary

Kate Woolveridge has undertaken a wide range of participatory projects with people of all ages, and regularly works with Welsh National Opera's MAX department. Kate Woolveridge believes that participatory arts are about enabling participants to explore and express themselves. Kate Woolveridge also believes that it is the journey, rather than the end product, that is the most important aspect of participatory arts.

### Motivation

Kate: I had done a little bit for the MAX department years ago and I'd been interested in the education - I teach singing anyway- as well as being a member of Welsh National Opera chorus. So I'd sort of come to opera two ways if you like, as an artist in my own right and then also as a teacher, and so the MAX department seemed to combine those two things in an excellent way; of doing the best sort of singing, and basically **imparting all that love of opera** to the community, the wider community. Erm, what really interests me is that opera, as an art form, is simply about telling stories through voice. And of course there are so many ideas that opera is elitist and has nothing to do with real life. And if you get rid of all the rubbish that surrounds it, opera is exactly about real life. Erm, so, I was really interested in the beginning in how we told stories through our voices, and um, made opera **accessible**.

It's all about the process of the work, and **the journey** that we all go on when we start a project. So if you take, for example, erm, a junior school and we go in and we'll ask them what they think opera is; what their perceptions of an opera singer is, and normally you get a big fat person who sings very high. So you start with that, and then you explain what opera is all about - and the orchestra, and the story telling - which is essential. And then the kids will go on a journey with you, and explore what opera is, and they'll get rid of all of those perceptions that someone else has given them. And generally, during the process, you will find that they will grow - that sounds a really naff word - but they will actually grow as a performer. Everybody's allowed to **experiment and explore** a little bit. So it's about them[the participants] **growing in confidence** in themselves.

### Quality and process

Kate: For me, **it's all about process**. How do I know I'm in a good process? Well, it's about the **team** you put together in the beginning 'cause, in this this sort of work there will always be a team of people; a project manager, and an animateur or a singer, and a pianist. And that would be the minimum team. So it's always about how the team come together, and the **vision for the project**. What do we want to achieve? Having a really clear goal. And I've never known, yet, it to be about the end performance. Erm, the excellence is about clear goals, taking the participants on a journey that is structured and has clear aims. Keeping a **trusting environment** so that all

those people - whether it be 80 year olds, or 6 year olds - feel that they're in an environment where they can explore their creativity. I've done one or two projects that haven't been as successful, but that's usually because that trusting environment hasn't been set up properly. You usually find, if you've got a performance at the end, people will know it's been a great project because of the **energy**, the joy that radiates through the singing. I can only speak about singing projects, but from singing you *know* when somebody sings with joy, with energy, with commitment, and it is so much about the team at the beginning and then the environment that is created in which the participants work.

Researcher: Thinking about having a vision, but having space to explore, how does that work in a project? How do you have that space to explore as well as have a vision or an aim?

Kate: I can only talk about specific projects. So last summer we had the orchestra of Welsh National Opera, and they were performing in Saint David's Hall, with two schools who learnt some opera to sing with the orchestra. And then you had 30 other schools who were going to go along and share that experience. So, the team got together, and the aims of the project were: for those children to understand what they were going to see; talk about what an orchestra was; think about what opera was; but also learn a little bit of the songs. So those were really clear goals. Now, within that we were enabling them to act out some of the stories, to write their own stories that were linked to our opera, to make orchestral noises - to become an orchestra. So **they were creating that world that we were offering**. We offered them the excellence at the end, and they were participants in that excellence in a fantastic venue, but along the journey they learnt all sorts of things and created their own world linked to that.

### Key skills and beliefs

Kate: A passion for singing and a **passion** for those people to sing back to you. It's essential that you create an **environment that's safe and fun**, and, always talking in **positive language**. Things I've learnt over the years is never, ever, ever to criticise, or block, or stop. Within schools you have to have very clear parameters 'cause you often have to be the disciplinarian as well. It should be that the teachers get involved, but, usually if you're the focal point then it's you that's running the session. So I always make it clear that there are the rules, this is how we work in a structured way. Within that we're allowed to have lots of fun. What I hope I bring is **energy**, fun, passion for singing, and an idea of excellence from everybody. I want **everyone in the project to be the best they can be**, not from a stick, not because I've told them that they have to be, but because you've raised the game. Because they believe they can do something well.

### Learning and developing skills

Kate: I think for anybody who is new coming into the field, the best way of learning the skills is to **take part**. I can only speak for the way that I learnt. I didn't go on any formalised training. Obviously I'm trained as a singer and I have some teaching certificates that say I can teach, but that means absolutely nothing. It was just **watching other people work**, sharing ideas, and actually doing it. The more you do with somebody perhaps guiding you, and giving you feedback that allows you, as a participatory artist, to be creative. And it's a never ending journey for us as artists because you will always find new ways of explaining, or opening up new worlds. You **can't go to schools and learn it**. You have to throw yourself in, have a go, think 'why did that work? Why didn't that work?' but maybe with a **mentor** or somebody who makes that safe for you as a young artist to have a go.

### Response to kite-marking

Kate: **I'm not sure how you judge** the quality of a project. You can't judge it by the final outcome - in my world that would be a performance - because you don't know where it started from. So, going back to my dementia choir, you may come and listen to that choir and they wouldn't sound like a fantastic choir, but knowing the journey they've been on, watching the process every week, that would be obvious to everybody about what a worthy and useful

project it is. How you judge that if you don't have somebody there every week? I don't know. How you give it stars, for eight out of ten this week because somebody sang better; you can't judge that either. What is better? What is good singing? Nobody agrees on that. I don't know how you do that kite mark. I'm not sure what it's all about. I don't know how you would judge it.

### Network

Kate: I think a network that enabled artists to - not advertise but - show what they do, or put a c.v. up there, or whatever, and projects they've done, that **might be quite useful**. I have found though, experience wise, it's mostly word of mouth that gets you these jobs, and you probably go back to the kite mark. You probably wouldn't employ anybody to do a really important project if you'd never seen their work. So, I suppose it's a way of **communicating what's going on** in that world.

## Extracts from interview with Helen Woods; freelance composer and music animateur

### Summary

Helen Woods enjoys the opportunity to work with other people, and sees participative arts as a collaborative process. Helen has created about 100 songs with participants, over the last 10 years; participants range from under-fives, to adults. Helen thinks that constant re-evaluation is important in the development of good participatory practice, as well as a personal understanding of why you are doing the work.

### Motivation

Helen: Well, being asked to go and do it, and, working freelance there's [chuckles] the money [laughs]. Having an opportunity, as I've said, to write on your own, work on your own, is great, but I like **collaborating** and I love to collaborate with other artists and other art forms. But, it's also really lovely to get a fresh perspective, **fresh energy from different groups** that you work with; whether that be children, or adults, individuals, or huge groups. So, y' know, I've done work where it would be working with one adult and it's creating a song with them using experiences from their life. Erm, but I've also just finished a project working with 80 children, across 2 schools, and creating 1 song using their ideas. Which is an interesting thing to do, erm, and you get a really varied song out of that because they've all got very different ideas of what they want in there.

### Quality

Helen: I think first of all [artists need] a **passion** for it. To feel totally engaged in what you're doing, and an **understanding of what and why you're doing something**. A belief that there is quality in this work; so that everyone knows the journey that work is taking and *why* we're doing it a certain way, and how that works. And a belief that it's good. I think that is the starting point. But I think also, in terms of quality, it's saying that just because this may be people's first introduction to an art form- that you never compromise on that- that we're still trying to get the very **best that each of those people can do**. Yes, it might be all **inclusive**, but we want to get the best out of everyone that's there.

Researcher: How do you balance between being inclusive and also getting the best out of people who've done it before? How do you balance that?

Helen: I think part of that also **depends on the project**. So, if you're working, erm, for instance in a group where they're playing instruments, and you've got some that 've only been playing for a short time, and others who've been for a lot longer, erm, you write someone who's been playing for longer a solo, so that everyone is working within their comfort zone but giving

someone with more skill and more experience an opportunity to shine and to bring more to a project which actually will motivate those that are playing their 3 notes that they know. Because, for most of the time, people want to work within their comfort zone and be pushed a little bit, but know that what they're producing is still good. So, if you've asked people to play beyond what they can do and it makes the instrument squeak, or their voice crack, or anything, because they weren't ready to do what you've asked them to do, they won't feel good about it, and nor will anyone else in that group. Whereas if you've pushed one person into doing a solo and it sounds amazing, the rest of the group will enjoy that as well, because they're part of that amazing sound.

### Developing skills

Helen: I think anyone sort of coming up and doing this kind of work- that they want to include other people - it's first of all really **knowing what is it that I as an artist want to achieve** and what would I be satisfied with at the end of a project? That the end product is something that I'm as proud of, as if I'd done the work just by myself, so that as you're working with other people you still have that pride in the work and that **respect** for the work, which means you're then respecting the people you're working with. So, I think **knowing what your strengths are** within that art form is quite important, so that you're kind of channelling things, you're very energised, and have a belief in it. Which then makes it a lot easier to energise other people if you have a belief in that work. And I think it's, **always evaluating** what you've done. Erm, I will always want to be going "that was great but how can I make it better?" And have that sort of attitude to my work, so that you're constantly re-evaluating what's quality? What's good? Has that engaged everyone? If it hasn't, what can I do in the future?

Researcher: Do you have that evaluation process at the end of a project? At the end of the day? Or do you do it constantly?

Helen: Constantly! I constantly am evaluating things. There are times where you're evaluating it when you're going: "ok, we've gone off message a little bit, we've gone in to a new area. Am I going to go with this [laughs] or should I be re-steering it?" [I was] working with a group of children [and it] was meant to be about their local area. We ended up writing horror songs about the graveyard, and a little bit of that would feed in - it didn't become a whole horror song but it energised them at that particular point because we were working at Halloween. Instantly the level of energy rose because they were doing something they wanted to do. I think it's **having that ability to sort of go with things.**

When there feels like there might be chaos, it's having that knowledge that you can get it back. You can rein in chaos. Y' know, the moment that you ask 30 small children to find themselves an instrument you have mayhem. I've found, over the years, the best thing is to ask them to get an instrument "and whilst you're getting your instruments, please try and make as much noise as possible"! That way you're not setting yourself up to fail [laughs]. [It's] finding way of coping.

[You need to be] very, **open to change** and to adapt. You also have to be quite **organised** with what you're doing. You've got something in mind that you can do, and the more you do things, the less you actually have to prepare that. Erm, if 10 years ago you'd stuck me in front of 100 children, and said "could you entertain them for an hour", er, 10 years ago I would have planned for about, I don't know, a day and a half before doing that. Whereas *now*, I've got enough in there that's kind of, over the years, developed that you could do it now; so there's 100 children out there, do it. And you just do something.

Researcher: Do you think the best way to pick up the skills up is to just by doing it?

Helen: Yes, I think you can **learn by doing**. Erm, and I think if you're learning by doing *and* you're still practicing your own art as well, so it's not just about participatory work, it's about

also your work and sort of bearing in mind: “What is good quality from my perspective?”, before you take it out there.

## Extracts from interview with Matt White; lecturer, fine arts practitioner and digital storyteller.

### Summary

Matt White’s participatory practice mainly involves making digital stories with a wide range of participants. He has made over 1000 stories during his participative practice. Matt feels that developing trust is particularly important because he is working with personal stories.

### Motivation

Matt: Erm, well there’s lots of reasons [why I do my participative work] - beyond the obvious financial one, which is a big help - but I’m an artist, so I’m less really concerned with financial remuneration. What I get is the **opportunity to meet all sorts of different people**. And, not just meet them, but, because the process involves seeing them in a number of different settings, and situations, and I get to spend time with them, and they’re often talking about things that are very personal, and very close to home; it means that I’m afforded the opportunity to really climb inside somebody’s head for a little while. So that’s *one* of the things; which is meeting people. And, secondly I get **the opportunity to hear their stories**, which in *my* head I’m kind of building up this ‘social history world view’ from the sorts of people that I’m working with. And beyond *those* sorts of benefits - I mean it’s, it’s great to **see somebody who is genuinely empowered**, albeit temporarily. There’s documented evidence of people moving out of difficult relationships partly because of the process of telling a story about it in the first place. That’s just one example, but you come across these *extreme* examples of people, erm, who have changed their lives in a small way by taking on a project. So, for me, that gives me a great sense of fulfilment, I suppose, that I’ve done something to change the world in a small way. Erm, beyond that, er, I’ve also found that it **feeds my contemporary fine art practice** as a gallery based video artist, not in terms of *material*- in other words the stories themselves, I’ve never used those - but, the way in which I work feeds in to my own practice and my own thinking in a really, kind of, gentle, background kind of way, which I find brilliant. Erm, but it also gives me a kind of rounded view of an audience who I’m making my contemporary art work for. So as well as - I get a greater sense of the people who come in to a gallery, so I’m not kind of *stuck* in a high art world. I have the opportunity to be amongst lots of other people who might never go to an art gallery. So, lots of reasons.

### Key skills and beliefs

Matt: On the one hand the **technical skills** that I’ve built up over the years in terms of, audio recording, video recording, working with stills, manipulating images, understanding the relationship between image and text in a narrative context, erm, those I would say are sort of practical skills. But I would say *more* importantly than that, are **interpersonal skills**; the ability to communicate thoughts, ideas, and to draw out stories from people in a comfortable relaxed, up-beat, hopefully enjoyable, way. So, afford people the opportunity to tell their own, sometimes difficult, stories in a comfortable environment. And I *seem* to be able to do that; to make people feel at ease, and to trigger, erm, areas of their memory which might of been left forgotten for a while, and to trigger little moments to try and draw stories out of people. And it’s things that they maybe don’t think are very important, and I give them the opportunity to make those small things a big deal, y’ know, in terms of their story. So, erm, interpersonal skills, **communication skills**, and, **having a laugh** really. I guess that’s what I’m, quite good at.

### Developing skills

Matt: Obviously **technical skills is easy to learn** if you feel so moved and have a general understanding of things technical but, I suspect the interpersonal side of things is more

something you're given, erm, rather than something you can learn. I think it's something we can all *improve*, erm, and I obviously **seek to improve** the way in which I relate to people given each new encounter; whether that's in a psychiatric hospital or a, erm, an enclave of religious women in South Germany, y' know. It's every time I meet a group of people, I think it probably adds to the experience that I have and it changes, probably, the way that I deal with people in the next project, certainly in a small way, so, I don't know. It's **experience**, and what you've been given in terms of how you communicate. Y' know, I know *lots* of people who are very, very, good technically- brilliant technically- but just don't have the ability to move people, to make people move others, and to give people belief; y' know, that's a big, big, skill, so I think it's a tricky one. But thankfully, it means I keep getting this work [laughs]!

### Quality

Matt: Quality in terms of the arts is a difficult **subjective** problem. Erm, I think there's too much, too many attempts to try and quantify and standardise art practice anyway; through education right from primary school up. It's impossible to standardise creativity really. And, for some reason, the powers that be feel that they need to continue to attempt to do it, even though overbearing evidence would suggest it's a *ridiculous* process. Erm, so in terms of quality, erm, in my projects, erm, again it's split into two, I would say, in the same way as the way I work; technical and interpersonal. In terms of quality you have a technical quality outcome and a more sort of an anecdotal mark of quality, I suppose. In the end, if you're doing a good job people employ you, and people want to make more stories, so, the project itself is self-fulfilling in that way.

There's **quality of experience** from each person, and, I think I'm kind of experienced enough at working with people to know when people are enjoying themselves, when they've had a good time. I mean, various organisations I work with always have the kind of generic feedback forms, some of which are generic, but y' know, there's obviously room for particular comments about certain things, which are usually favourable. So in terms of that side of quality, it's something I'd **monitor all the time**, and would constantly change my approach in an appropriate way, not just for each group but also as each person that I'm working with works their way through the project. I'll kind of constantly monitor that to make sure they're enjoying themselves. Sometimes having a good time isn't *just* a mark of quality. Sometimes people have to have a difficult time in order to enjoy the project at the end. Erm, it's the sort of project that people don't understand the sort of things that they go through unless they actually go through the process.

In terms of **technical quality**, erm, I guess because I started doing digital stories with the BBC, I have this kind of project specific, inbuilt, desire to make things potentially broadcast quality, if they can be, erm, both in terms of the audio and the image. And I kind of believe that stories are such - so important to the world, and to each person - that I'll try and make them as good a quality as I possibly can. Erm, sometimes going to ridiculous lengths to record a decent audio; for instance, attempting to remove echoes from insides of small chapels by building soft dens out of table and chairs, or filling museum toilets with soft furnishings in an attempt to create a neutral, passive, sound for the story. But I **aim for the highest possible** really, given the acoustic situation and the images that I have available to help make the story with, if you know what I mean. And the proof is in the eating really, isn't it?

### Process or product?

Matt: It depends on each person really. I'd say it's **predominantly process**. I'd say it's something like 80% process and 20% product, for me, that's kind of ok. But for some people the product is incredibly important. One of the best examples of that, I suppose, is working with a group of kids who find school a constraining thing, probably. They don't like school much, they don't like learning in a traditional way. But, I worked with a park ranger who'd organised to do a project based outdoors. So, we started the whole project outdoors to help generate ideas for

stories, before moving indoors to work on technical stuff. And then we projected the stories in to the forest, where we began the process. And, for that, the product was incredibly important because their parents were invited, and we had a night time outdoor screening with hot chocolate and chestnuts, and all that stuff. And for some parents it's the first thing they've ever seen their children *achieve* because they don't have the tangible evidence that school would normally give you in terms of report books, and marks, and grades, and that kind of thing. But what they could suddenly see is their kids had written something themselves, and produced something themselves, and there they were being projected in a big forest in the valleys. Erm, so in terms of that then the **product is important** for not only the young person - who probably looks at what they made now and cringes - but more importantly to the parents. But that product could only be a part of the process as well, so the things are **intermingled**. They gave up 4 days of their half term. They really enjoyed it. And it's 'cause they were given the opportunity to say something about something they liked doing, y' know. So, one of them-seemed like a minute and a half or something - told a story about how much he liked climbing trees. Erm, and it was terribly spelt, it was read, sort of, disjointedly, but it was a lovely little thing, y' know. And the whole point is, it was about them, **to explore things** about themselves without being bound down by rules really. I mean, I gave them rules. I mean, there's a lovely line in it where he goes, he's talking about climbing trees: "When I get to the top, when I get to the top, I climb to the top, I climb up all the branches to the top, until I get to the top, and that considers me a good climber". Y' know, completely wrong grammatically, but who cares?

I certainly don't bog the participants down with notions of a product, until the end. It's all about this **process of building blocks** towards the finished thing and I think that's important too 'cause thinking too much about the end result can end up stifling creativity as well, I think.

### Kite mark

Matt: In a word no, erm, because it's a very, very, **difficult** thing to make subjective judgments about a project that you're not totally part of. And it would also **break down that level of trust** between me and the participants. And I suspect anybody who was coming to quantify a project probably wouldn't be there all the time, they would pop in and *observe* for an afternoon. And the projects that I run, anybody who's in the room, certainly at the first part of the process which we call a story circle, everybody has to take part. If you're not taking part you can't be in the room. And I've done that in prisons, in hospitals, wherever; that's the rules. Erm, and so, if you have somebody observing then that's not going to work. So I think it's unmanageable and impractical. I don't think it would happen. And I think that, far from being standardised, I think **good practice rises to the top**, really, because people who don't do a good job, don't get work again. I mean, I suppose you could argue it could be something for young people to aim at, some sort of qualification, but, y' know, I haven't got qualifications to do this, technically. I don't have anything on paper, apart from a couple of degrees, and that's it, y' know. I'm not a qualified digital story telling facilitator, it doesn't exist. I'm just somebody who happens to have a bunch of skills which are kind of handy to help people make stories in a particular way. So, it may be helpful to some practice, but it's not like plumbing, for instance. You can't have a British Standard of Creativity. It's just not going to work.

### Developing trust and a social contract

Matt: I sort of don't feel that I *can* [use participant material in my personal practice]- if I did it would be fine, and I'm sure most people I've worked with would be happy to do that - because the process also involves a level of **trust** that's built up between you and them; which you can only really get by working with people quite a *bit* and spending time with them, erm, so there's a level of trust that's built between each other and obviously I wouldn't want to change that. I've kind of got a bit of a **social contract**, I suppose, with them. Although technically I could get them to sign a form, and whatever else, I sort of don't feel it's appropriate. I sort of don't feel it's in the spirit of the project. Having said that, if I found the right vehicle, erm, and I felt so moved to do so, and I was working on an idea where using some of those stories was *appropriate*, I would

potentially think about doing that. I've seen examples where people have done that, [it's] really interesting, but also kind of difficult. So guess it's a sort of social contract, or a sort of contract that I don't feel I can't contravene unless there's a really good conceptual reason.

## Extracts from interview with Phil Williams; Dance creator, choreographer, and performer.

### Summary

Phil Williams has worked on a wide variety of community projects. Phil Williams' participatory work is an important part of his practice, as it was where he developed his love of dance. Phil Williams believes that participant ownership is particularly important, but recognises that a complex mix of skills are needed to enable that participant ownership.

### Motivation

Phil: This is how I started to become where I am today - how I started becoming a dancer - by doing workshops and participation weeks that were led by companies like National Dance Company of Wales, where they came in to my school and did workshops. And that really turned me on to dance, as it were. And suddenly I changed from wanting to be a sports scientist and a rugby player to being a dancer - kind of overnight really- because of those workshops. And I think when you go through that system of being a dancer, and teaching workshops, and **seeing what it does for young people**, and how it can change their lives, as it did mine, y' keep going. So that's the first and foremost reason why I do it.

I go to **open their eyes to the art form** and, I mean, I do work with aspects of the community which never *ever* go in to a dance studio or have the opportunity to because at the end of the day doing ballet especially, and other forms of dance, and other forms of activities, cost money. And, y' know, a lot of people don't have that. A way in is what I like to give to people 'cause it gives them something else in their lives.

### Quality

Phil: Well, first and foremost, I think, all participations have to be **fun**. Erm, fun, and **safe**, and something that promotes the art form, but promotes the actual participants themselves; they're the key thing in this, and the **participants have to have complete ownership** over what they do. I go in as a facilitator. I go in and teach them, and help their imagination to go, and let them go places where they never dreamt of going before, but in a safe environment where they can do that. Y' know, through the medium of dance, or drama, or theatre, whatever it be, to make them comfortable and to express themselves in a different way.

### Key Skills and beliefs

Phil: I think you have to be **open to anything**, and be **open to the people who are participating**, and to be able to feed off them, and be able to welcome them as part of a team. I'm **not a teacher** who stands at the front and tells them what to do. I don't dictate, or [say] anything that needs to be done. And to **listen to them**, and help them free things in their head and their bodies that they never thought they could. So, the ability to allow them to work hard, and play hard, and have fun within set boundaries but not to dictate. And to tell them that it, y' know, to have a sense of pride about what they do because everything is valid, and I'm there just to make it better [laughs]!

### Learning skills

Phil: I think the more you *do* the easier it becomes. And I have been doing this for, ooh, wow; 13 years now I've been teaching workshops to, people. You do develop an innate skill. You have a massive **tool bag which you pick up along the way**. You know, you *do* make mistakes and hopefully you're working with people who can rectify those mistakes quickly, but along the way

you learn not to. You learn how to get the best out of every single person that you work with; it's not just about one or two people in the group. It's about the whole group achieving, a massive thing together. And that's, that's, amazing. And you have to make every one of those people shine and, y' know, love that moment they have on stage. So, yeah, you keep, **you keep developing.**

### Process or product

Phil: I think the product and participation values have **equal weight** because they teach people different things. The process is really important in terms of young people working in a team, working with different artists, and developing that knowledge of the arts. That's one thing, about process; how they go through that, and how they learn, and how they develop as a person, and as an artist. But then the performance is something else because people don't necessarily get the chance to do that performance. And it does give them something different; it gives them an enormous sense of pride, to say "I've achieved something". And, y' know, you've got Saint David's Hall packed out, not just with mums and dads but, y' know, public as well. To achieve that is incredible. So I think to go through the process and have a product at the end of a great production with massive production values, y know, you can't, you can't, buy that. It's something that very few get the chance to do, and I'm privileged to work with those people who can get chance to do it.

Researcher: How do you find the right balance when you get to a participatory project - between making sure they have a good process and making sure you have a good product at the end?

Phil: I think that almost comes from the initial start-up really. I mean, you can go and teach an hour and a half work shop with, y' know, a very little performance element at the end, but I think you have to give these people a **chance to first of all develop and then to show what they've developed** because I think that's the whole thing. Sometimes the performance might be 30 seconds long just in the studio, showing what they've done, but they have to get used to that performance element. And sometimes it might be a longer, y' know, one week/ two week and then a massive performance with huge production. But, I think they need a mixture of both, and then you have to have that evaluation. I think you have to have the rehearsal process, the performance process, and the evaluation; I think all that is important to young people as they develop, rather than feeling that they just participate in something, and then it's forgotten. I think there has to be a performance which you will remember.

So **there should be a performance with every part of participation** because that's what we do as artists. Y' know, otherwise we'd just dance around in a studio all day, and, y' know, the tax payer would get annoyed [laughs]! So, yeah, I think there has to be a balance between the two.

## Extracts from interview with an anonymous artist; animateur and workshop leader

### Summary

This artist works across the UK delivering music based workshops to vulnerable adults, as well as young people, and children. This artist is also involved in training other participatory artists. This artist believes that some skills can easily be taught, but interpersonal skills can't be taught. This artist would like funders to take more interest in the process of participatory projects, and to include sufficient time in a project. This artist also believes that the importance of the process and the product varies hugely depending on the context.

### Motivation

Artist: I think for me personally, almost in a selfish level, it is a very, very, **creative thing to do**, so, apart from all the altruistic **helping people**, it is actually incredibly creative. So as a singer,

because I'm a singer, you know, if you go into a singing job you get given the music, you get pretty much told how to sing it and you stand there and do it; and it's a great challenge because you've got to do it but that's basically it, you don't have a creative input in the same way. Whereas when you go into a workshop with 12 disabled children, or whatever, *you* as an artist have to draw *all* your skills together to create something that's going to engage them. And the planning - what you choose to take to that workshop, how you put it together, how you make it accessible, how you deliver it, how you then work in that space with whatever's thrown at you in the actual moment - it's a much more creative process, I think, than perhaps some of the performing side of things; it's even more creative than that, so for me, that's the draw.

### Quality

Artist: For the children I work with, perhaps for special needs settings, it's perhaps very different to [other projects]. I mean, for them it would be **small changes over a long period of time**. So, you might notice somebody's said a word or you know. Umm, it is quality because the product has to be good, it has to be good enough to get those results. So perhaps it's not something you can measure. Perhaps there's **short term measures and long term measures**. So you've got to be able to see some changes in people, so perhaps that's where it is. You've got to see some changes or some benefits from what you've offered. Umm, so with a child it might be that they've increased their communication skills, or it might be that their teacher says they're now able to sit down and listen to a piece of music whereas before they only ran around.

I always want to have what I call my 'light bulb moment'. I want one **light bulb moment** in every workshop [laughs]. You need to have one moment where everybody, the *WHOLE* room, has a click [clicks fingers]: 'yes, we're doing this together'. Maybe it's halfway through, or, or, you're singing for 3 minutes, or 2 minutes, and it's just at the end everybody realises that this is what they're creating together. It's *that* moment. And after it everyone starts screaming and clapping, you know. It doesn't necessarily have to be a screaming clapping moment. It's a moment where you've had a little **achievement**.

There's lots of **praise and feedback** all the time, especially for working with vulnerable adults. So I would be saying all the way through 'Well, that was great. Can you see where that was going?' Perhaps a lot of quality, in the end, comes from the feedback from the people themselves, from the evaluation you get out of it. From children, from the teachers. A lot of it is just people telling you "well, that's led to this", so you know "oh good", you know. **You know it's done something**. Yeah, and that's really important. We do a lot of **evaluation** to be sure that what we're doing is working.

### Skills and beliefs

Artist: I'd love to be able to say that everyone needs to believe that you want to help people, but I really don't think it comes from that. But, the best leaders **do believe in it**. I think in the traditional way they do believe in it, the best people they really do, and they come away from a workshop thinking far more than 'thank goodness that's my £90', y' know. It's much more than that.

The very first skill, for me, should be that they are **professionals in their field as an artist**, because I think without that there's a limit to what you can offer. So, unless you're out there working as a professional singer or whatever it is, I don't think you should really necessarily be doing it because I think you're delivering. I'm against a community guitarist who can play a few chords. I'm not saying they're not going to be any good, but that's one of my non-negotiables: that they're out there working in their field.

The next key skill is that 'people person skill', that, y' know, little bit of psychology. Without that, the best artist in the world won't make a good workshop leader, won't be a participatory motivator. So it's that **people skill**, and we call it a bit of reverse psychology. You can go into a

room and create something with people who have all sorts of issues around authority, or anything, y' know, you've got to be that kind of person that can manage a room. And **step back** and become faceless, and not be 'you, the artist' but be 'you, facilitating the process'. So it's quite a subtle skill, but it's also quite a big box of skills.

The third one would be to have that **wide range of skills**. You know, you can walk in and be the musician, perhaps also the director, perhaps also a people person, you can perhaps do some composing, you can put a different hat on. So it's a big wide range of skills.

### Developing skills

Artist: I would say the 'people relationship' thing can't be taught. But the stuff that can be taught: I think you can **shadow people**, and you can try it yourself over time but no matter how much you're trying it yourself over time, if you're not having the stimulus and the **input from training**, and actual **coaching**, and going on training courses, you don't - I mean, a lot of the stuff that I do, I've learnt from other people and I've made it my own, so it's really important. But you can learn absolutely, I mean, you can teach someone: here is an opera, how on earth do we find some accessible bits and how on earth can we find sign posts that would mean that someone could go to that opera, sit through 3 hours of it, and know it inside out without learning the entire thing. And that's a skill. You can teach someone how to do that.

You can teach someone how to plan a 2 hour workshop and how to break it down in to ice breakers or warm ups, and useful skills, and when to move off that and when to change tack, and when to come back to that and when to have the break. You can teach all that. You can teach them good **ethical practises** like always start in a safe environment, how do you set up a safe environment? Um, what do you do when you have an unsafe environment? How can you still make that safe? All these different things you can teach. So I think **a lot can be taught** but I think that people skill, if that actual empathetic people skill isn't there and that ability to manage a room- 'cause that's not easy- if that's not there I think it's hard to learn. That's hard to learn. That's my experience anyway.

### Process or product:

Artist: This is the question I've been asked, ever sense I started doing work, or I've asked. Um, well it's **definitely both, and it does depend on the project**. So for example, with my special needs children it really, really, is the process because, at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter to them, um, what product they create. Having said that it does matter a bit, but the leaning there would be much more towards the process. But at the end of their 20 sessions with me, or whatever, if they can also go to the festival which I did with them last year, and have their little moment on the stage, which we did, and see that there's an audience going there, and for that audience to get something from what they're giving, and not just a pat on the back, you know, then that definitely does have a benefit. But it's very much not the whole thing. But with [vulnerable adults] I think it's very unconventional to say that the product is more important, but it almost, *almost*, is. For vulnerable adults sometimes it is that final product that they feel is the thing that they can showcase. And it is that final product that allows them to phone up their friends and family and they say: "come and see what I've been doing for the last 2 years", y' know? And without the product they can't do that; they can't invite people to a workshop and they wouldn't want to bring them to that environment, but if they can say "look, here's a cd we all did last year" or, "on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November we're going to be at this venue and we're going to perform what we've created". Um, that is a product that they can share, and that is really, really, important. But you **can't have a good product without a good process**, so I'd say, if you do chose the product you're automatically saying that there's a process involved. But it **has to be the right process**; you wouldn't just want to teach people and they don't have any input. So it's both.

I think it's very much dependant on the **goal and the aim of that organisation**; as a participatory artist you need to know that right from the beginning. And if somebody books you

for a job and says “my aim is a fantastic little performance in three days’ time” - which does happen- they might say “you’ve got 3 workshops in a school to create something and then we’re all going to come together on day 4 and perform them”. For me, that’s a real waste of 3 days, because in 3 days, the only way you can create that fourth day performance is by rehearsing, rehearsing, rehearsing, by rote. That’s the only way you can do it, unless you do something that’s really quite improvised, which is probably what I’d do but it is a bit more of a risk. So that for me, is a waste of 3 days because I don’t want to work like that. I want to **work in an exploratory** way, with the group to create something. I don’t like those very short term projects where you’ve *got* to have a performance at the end.

Researcher: Does that happen a lot? Or more than-

Artist: It does happen quite a lot, yeah, because **funders like to see something**. They like to say “great, you go in for 3 days and then we want to see what you’ve been doing”. But we’d love to say to them “Well, come and see what we’ve been doing, come and see *how* we’ve been doing it. Come and see the whole process, come and see a whole afternoon of how we work together.

### Planning workshops

Artist: So whatever your central aim of the workshop is, everything goes backwards from that point. So, all my warm ups will be geared to that point, and my finisher will be geared around whether that was the finish, we’ll finish on that. So, you’re setting your workshop up to have that, especially for working with vulnerable adults who might only come to one workshop, and then they might have moved on. So you can’t rely on them being there 10 weeks in a row. So you want each workshop to have a self-contained purpose as well as a long term purpose.

## Extracts from interview with Sarah Harman; natural voice tutor, singer and song writer

### Summary

Sarah Harman has been working in the participatory arts for over 20 years. Her participatory practice often involves working with disadvantaged sections of the community. She believes that participatory arts should empower the participants. Sarah Harman is also involved in training participatory artists

### Motivation

Sarah: I think one of my main motivations, and there are 2 really, one is about, um, **helping people** to bring about change in their lives, and take more control over their lives. The people who really need to do that, and don’t have the power in their own lives, is [sic] quite often those people in the disadvantaged groups. And then the other side is about **the creative impulse** for me really. I think creativity is a basic human need. And that, erm, quite often people who are struggling in the basics of their lives don’t leave time for creativity, or they don’t think they’re creative. We’ve got a massive culture that says some people are born to be experts, some people have got talent, and some people are destined to be audiences and should never sing again - in Simon Cowell’s words. Part of my work, is refuting that. I really do believe that everybody can sing, and/or be creative in some way. And that it’s a human right to do that, and it enriches our lives, it **gives us more control and power**. It gives us time out from the hardships of life. It’s a chance for people to reflect on their lives, to, erm, work with other people, make something.

### Skills and beliefs

Sarah: One of the things I’m encouraging new comers in to the field to do is to find out what they believe, what their approach is, um, so that they can develop their practice to best reflect that belief. For *me*, I think, it is that commitment to um, the *need* for creativity; the human impulse for creativity. And the **belief that everybody can do it**, that it isn’t limited to a few people. And

also I think a belief that you don't *necessarily* have to have a high level of technical skill to enjoy participating, in my case singing/voice work. That actually you don't need much to be able to do it. Obviously you can take it up to a very extended, developed, level; but you don't *need* that to be able to do it.

I would **never sacrifice the wellbeing, and sense of wellbeing, of somebody** who's participating in a group to the quality of the product, if you like. That, when it comes down to it I would always sacrifice the quality of the product. Not that I make that decision very often, 'cause what you're doing is trying to help people to reach their potential, which is usually way higher than they thought it was.

In terms of the skills, I think, erm, for me, it's a quite **high level of technical skill**. Um, and I don't mean that I've got a degree in music, 'cause I haven't, but I have spent a lot of years working on techniques which work in this field. So, exploring what kinds of exercises and approaches are going to work to help people gain confidence, and do, rather than excluding them. So, that's some technical knowledge about how the body works, and what effects certain approaches have; finding exercises that I can explain with visual images that will enable people to understand how to do them. Um, the **choosing of material that's appropriate** to the skill level of the people in the group, erm, and that's a knowledge thing really, rather than a skill. Um, being able to, erm, break down a piece of music in to chunks, you know, teachable chunks; in the same way you would with any piece of learning. Y' know, give people small steps and build it up. General **teaching skills**: how to communicate, how to demystify, giving people things that they can actually do and building it up, and judging when people are ready to go on to the next stage. For me, [it's] quite important that you understand how groups work, and how people learn. Which is sort of background, um, **theoretical knowledge**.

And then I think there's a huge amount of **attitude** stuff in there, which is based on this belief that everybody can do it, and that I am *temporarily* in charge of the group, but actually that's a temporary contract that I've made with the group... And I think with that helps me to work in partnership with the group, if you like. So I do a lot of asking people how it's going. I'm **working in partnership** with them, on their own learning. I mostly work with adults, so you know, they're mostly quite aware of their own kind of needs, and when they're stuck.

### Developing skills

Sarah: It is always really helpful if you can **put some theory to your practice**. But because it's a participatory - because it's about participation - there is *no way*, I think, there's no way of **doing it** without doing. And you have to be in an environment where you can make mistakes, and learn from your *own* practice because, y' know, you can go and be protected by somebody, and I really recommend that people **work alongside a more experienced artist** or erm, y' know. So I think I would say get your experience and your training as broadly as you can.

For me, learning is very important but I think *because* we're working on our own quite a lot, we're not getting that professional input as part of our day-to-day structure, it's really important to maintain some humility, I think, about the level of your skills. And we have a duty to *ourselves*, and the people that we're working with to do our job as well as we can. And I think that does mean: **go and watch other people work**, get some feedback, **ask for feedback** on what you've done, take notice of the feedback, go to other workshops. Y' know, if you're offered training and learning, if you can, take the opportunities, because even though it takes time out of the paid work, it can really make your work better. And also, you know, those [sic] kind of **networking**, keeping in touch with people, will always give you positive benefits, which might be even getting more work, but also they give you new ideas, new ways of looking at things. I remember when I first started I was working with this woman who was a visual artist, and she worked completely differently from me. At that point I was doing drama stuff, and for me, you walk in to a room and you call out and everybody comes and joins you, and it's a very loud and

proactive process, getting people engaged. And she would just go in to a room, get all the materials out on the table - she wouldn't say anything - and she'd start making things herself, and then gradually the children would just all go over. She would engage with them in a completely different way, and it was really useful for me because it was *so* different. And I couldn't do it, I actually couldn't work in that way 'cause I was too impatient - and it didn't work with drama stuff anyway- but it was really helpful just to watch her. And just experiences like that, I think, can be, can be, really powerful.

So, you know, just **working collaboratively**, sharing ideas. And, I think, being a member of organisations, umbrella bodies, so in my case you know, sound sense, the national community music association, the natural voice practitioners network, erm, you know, **being part of organisations** that you have something in common with, and some similarities, helps you to keep up to the latest ideas, and what other people are doing, and that can be really powerful, I think.

### Kite Marking

Sarah: I think, the question for me would be: **Who would set it?** Who would be *doing* the kite mark? Because I've got very *strong* ideas about, kind of, about what's good participatory work, and what isn't. I think it might be possible to agree it in the sector, and if that was the case, I guess, I would welcome it. I think, the thing is, that there are so many people doing such specific smaller chunks of an overall job; it's not like a *job* that you can kind of define. Erm, so it would have to be a really **flexible set of competencies** that you know people had, so that you could enable people to come in who, who are the most amazing creative people and break all the rules that anybody would ever have said, and yet produce the most amazing results. So, I think, **I'm not against it**, and I would be interested in helping look at how that might be, but I guess **it wouldn't be my priority**. And I have to say, when they tried to develop an NVQ in Community Arts, I think it was, when I was working at Community Music Wales we tested some of those, it actually was really difficult getting people to sign up to it. Because you're actually talking about creative people who aren't that interested in academic structures. You'd have to make it so it was really practically based, and could be judged on peoples *doing* of the job, rather than a lot passing exams, I think.

You'd have to get recognition for it, I think, because actually people who employ, me or contract me, to do work tend to hear about me through the networks, and reputation, and - certainly at the moment - they wouldn't know if the qualification I have was any good or not. If you're gonna set up a kite mark **you'd have to promote what the kite mark was**. And I think it'd be really important to work in partnership with organisations like Sound Sense who have been thinking about codes of practice. And they've got a code of practice that their members sign up to. And the Natural Voice Practitioners Network has got a code of practice that it's members sign up to, which is about a certain level, certain standard, or practice.

### Quality

Sarah: For me, the priority is **supporting the people in the group to develop** at their own pace, in the way that they want to. And to help them to reach their potential, if you like. You want somebody who doesn't use any jargon or, if they did use jargon explained it, was really clear in their communication, really listened and engaged with what was going on in the group, and was very aware of the pace at which people needed to go in order to learn. So, **enough challenge**, but not giving them so much challenge in the beginning that they just can't cope. So, an awareness of the speed and the way in which the people are learning. And I think that that real **sense of partnership** with the group. So, definitely leading, clear leadership, but in a way that is, erm, responding and working with the people in the group. Other than the things I said earlier about the skills that you need, I think it's much easier to describe a bad workshop, actually, it's interesting.

Researcher: You could tell me about what isn't good?

Sarah: Well, the worst workshop I ever went to [the facilitator] wasn't modelling good vocal practice. He was making mistakes, he wasn't prepared, he didn't have the background in the style of music. So that for me was just epitomising a lack of preparedness- a lack of real knowledge, and skills, and understanding of the art form- because it's not just about the notes, it's about how you sing it. [There was] no acknowledgment of who was in the room, he didn't even ask if anybody had got any experience at the beginning, which I would always do. And then to argue with [a participant] when she started contributing, erm, her own feelings about it. Erm, all of those things made it the worst workshop I've ever been in, I think. He wasn't being authentic with them, with the medium he was using, and he was teaching badly. So, the opposite of that!

### Network

Sarah: I'm a member of several networks and they serve me well actually. They do help me keep up with best practice. So, I'm pretty much in favour of networks. Erm, I think it would need to **be clear what it was about**. I think my question would be, *how* would it be useful, how would it be useful across art form. I think it would need to demonstrate why it would be useful to be talking about issues of participation across art form, and I think it could probably do that, and if it did that it would be useful. And I think some practical help, erm, like, training days, or skills sharing days, or discussion on particular issues. Something that's actually **adding value** 'cause people are really busy and, obviously if you're working freelance, you can't take time out of work - paid work - so something that would give people an immediate reason to be there I think, and then maybe other stuff would follow on from that.

I think you'd have to think about the balance between the organisations involved and the individuals involved, erm, because there's a sort of power differential there. But there might be some value in bringing people together. I think you'd have to be careful it didn't become kind of competitive bid to get in with the people who might offer you work, it would have to be something outside of that, but yeah, I think it's a strong enough idea to think about.

### Ownership

Sarah: I think what I haven't mentioned, and I don't know where it ought to have gone, is something about ownership. If you're setting up projects, I think one of the key elements of success is that the people in the **group feel like they own it**. And, erm, I think that's what makes participatory arts work different from say a class. What I try and foster - and I know other people doing that as well-, is a sense of ownership of the group. So people have a say in the decisions that are being made in the group. And you might be the expert but actually it's quite a lot of dialogue about 'is this alright?', 'Would you like to do that?', 'How did that go?', 'What would you like to do that next term?', 'Shall we do this?', 'We need to decide this'. So ownership of the decision making processes, which is part of the key to, I think, a successful and a quality participatory group.

## Extracts from interview with Terry Chinn; artist designer on participation projects

### Summary

Terry Chinn works on both small and large scale participatory projects. Terry Chinn believes that having space to explore, and time to 'play', is particularly important in participative projects. He believes that the importance of the process and product varies according to each project, but Terry also believes that this is largely decided by the funder or commissioner.

## Motivation

Terry: Well, because I'm from South Wales, and there's a big tradition of the amateur movement, where there weren't professional artists. But, in the small town that I'm from we had a lot of theatre companies, opera companies, musical companies, erm, where your family would get involved. So you'd be in a performance, or watching your friends in a performance - or family - so I've always grown up with that feeling: "Well, you're doing it", instead of just watching it. You're actually doing the work all the time.

Researcher: And why is that important to you?

Terry: **I just know the value of getting involved** in creative work. I grew up, erm, hated school, never went to school, but, erm, I spent my teenage years working in amateur theatre. So, I wouldn't be in school but I'd be working on say 3 or 4 musicals in a month and a performance every Thursday. And I had mentors. I had older mentors who were, sort of, guiding me. I see that value of work, for people engaged in creative work, even if they're not actually getting paid for it. I think erm, y' know it is of great value for them. It gives them, y' know, a lot of things back in their lives.

## Key skills and beliefs

Terry: **Communication**, and a **belief that everyone can contribute**. Sometimes we're asked to work with people who've got difficulties and sometimes they wanted to hide their creativity, or they've got communication problems, or whatever. So, you have to manage that and try to dig quite deep sometimes to get that back out of people. It's going to be there but it's finding the right way of getting to it and finding how they can express it. Um, that could be very, very, simple things, er, usually have to keep it quite simple and then, er, we can build that up in to more complex things; especially if you're working with a group, things do become quite complex when you bring other people in to into a project and working on something. So, the belief is erm, everyone's got something to contribute.

## Developing skills

Terry: Is it something you can learn? Up to a point, yes, yes you can. There are ways of training people to recognise what is needed to bring things out of other people. Um, I *do* think, though, that there needs to be something already there within you that motivates you to **want to do the work**. Unless you want to do it, it's not going to happen, you wouldn't persevere with it. So, I think that there are ways; in the same way you can be a good teacher - you can train people in to teaching, I think the really, really, good teachers are the ones who've got something in them. They're so motivated to become a teacher, um, you're half way there.

## Process or product

Terry: I think that **every project is different**. And so, you can't really say one way or the other, erm, what's more important. Erm, it **depends on the agenda of the funder**. If the funder is asking you, or the person who's commissioned the work, err, that it's much more important to get a *fantastic* performance at the end of this because we've put a lot of money in it and it's the prestige of the company is resting on this, then, you feel sometimes that the process has to be cut short because the risk can't be taken with something not being, err, up to a certain performance standard 'cause it's on public display. Erm, so, I think a lot of that comes down to *who* is designing the project - as in, who's designing the scheme of work, or, who set the project up - and have they given enough resources to it? Have they given a period for the process to happen? And then take it on to another stage where the product can be refined, perhaps. Erm, a lot of the work I do can be one off performances, or one off exhibitions. Because they're one offs, you don't get a chance to do it again, to refine stuff. So it has to be done on energy and, er, some other things that would make it work! But, y' know, the **energy** is the main thing of those performances. Erm, so, yeah, it's a difficult question but I think that every performance, or every project has its own **context**, and you have to look at the context of the project.

## Play

Terry: The **playful projects** that we do, there's an awful lot of play in it. Erm, 'cause **people relax** when there's a sense of play and when you're relaxed you can actually do really, really, good work. A lot of artists have to get in to that playful state, y' know. It's ok to be tense and sort of, very sort of, erm, rigid and you think: "ooh I'm really going to do a fantastic piece of work" but it **has to flow** as well. So, usually part of a project is that we get people to relax and to get quite creative, erm, and the work does flow out of them.

## Conclusions

These artists were chosen to undertake a case study in recognition of their skills at delivering participatory projects. Whilst artists in different art forms employ different specific techniques to engage participants, there is some similarity in the beliefs and skills that are needed, as well as the best ways to develop them.

Artists responded that participatory artists needed to have technical skills within their own art form, but more importantly they needed to develop excellent interpersonal skills. These skills included the ability to communicate with others, the ability to manage a room, and to put people at ease. Participatory artists also need to build trust in order to create a safe environment that participants could creatively explore and 'play'.

Mentoring or apprenticeships were thought to be particularly useful tools for helping early career artists develop their skills. These tools were frequently mentioned because they were thought to provide a safe space for artists to hone their skills, make mistakes, and receive feedback. Many of the artists in the case studies had learnt their skills in a similar way, and thought that it was important to learn by 'doing' rather than undertaking academic courses.

As well as developing skills and knowledge, the artists from the case studies also thought it was important that participatory artists had the right attitudes and beliefs. It was very important to believe in the value of participatory work, as well as to believe that everyone can contribute. Artists responded that they wanted participants to feel ownership of a project, and that they wanted to share their skills with the participants in order to empower them.

Responses to developing a kite mark for participatory artists were mixed. Questions about kite marking with either met with hostility or with concern. Those artists that were not opposed to the idea of a kite mark were concerned about its development, and about the organisation that would be responsible for assessing artists. Responses to the development of an online network were much more positive. Many of the artists questioned, although experienced, still expressed feelings of isolation due to the nature of the job.

Artists would like to see more opportunities for networking, both online and face to face. They would also like to see funders and organisations take more interest in the 'process' of a participative project; artists would like sufficient time to be built in to projects to enable participants to explore and develop.