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| *My culture, my London*  *Where next?* |
| Workshop notes for AND  6th June 2014 |

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Workshop notes

Background

These notes follow on from the workshop that was held in Lift, Islington on 13th May 2014. The workshop was convened following the original ethnographic study. The reason for the workshop was because MCML revealed a set of barriers to engagement with the arts, and finished with a short set of possible ideas that arose naturally from the study. The workshop was, therefore, an investment in seeing if a group of committed stakeholders could take the momentum of MCML onwards into potential ideas to deal with some of the core barriers.

These note are the write up of that workshop. In addition to the key professional stakeholders, there were members of the AND team and three young people who will act as a bridge between this stakeholder workshop and the forthcoming youth workshop.

For context, the workshop opened with a quick précis of the MCML report.

There were two core sections to the workshop – one was an idea generation session, capturing lots of quick ideas and then sharing them to create a ‘heat map’ of strong and popular ideas. This was followed by voting, to establish common areas of enthusiasm. Finally, the four leading ideas were divided between the four tables and developed from a single thought to create a straw man initiative. These four ideas (developed in more detail below), will be critiqued in more detail by the young people’s workshop in July.

What did we learn?

The notes below capture the outputs from the session, but there are also worthwhile observations that the process revealed:

1. Some natural aspirations that stakeholders have on behalf of young people and culture are very hard to give shape to in reality. For instance, the idea of giving YP a representative voice at a senior level in arts organisations feels intuitively right to many, but putting a realistic (or even idealistic) structure to that is much harder in practice.
2. YP are always one step ahead of the older generation when it comes to technology, and this needs to be factored into idea generation. For example, the idea of websites is quickly receding – for YP, to all intents and purposes the internet *is* social media, and word of mouth almost entirely revolves around Facebook and Twitter.

The ‘I wish’ statements

Altogether, the stakeholders in the room generated over 100 individual ideas, all created independently of one another. Inevitably, there were some strong areas of crossover, so the notes in this section represent the main clusters, which show where all the energy is. The first four areas (in bold) resulted in the highest quantity of voting, which indicates the most amount of pure enthusiasm.

1. **Reduce the perceptual gap between the old, traditional arts (heavy hitters like opera, West End theatre etc.) and newer, more obviously youth oriented arts (gigs, spoken word etc.)**
2. **Increasing the representation of YP on administrative committees and boards**
3. **A dedicated app/site/FB page that aggregates all arts opportunities (including participation) that are aimed at YP, and includes user generated content from YP too**
4. **Increase the breadth of the cultural offer in schools**
5. Elevating the status, creativity and quantity of arts subjects in schools
6. Making more free tickets available for YP, along with free/cheaper travel to get to more distant venues
7. Make better use of spaces in and around cultural venues to ensure that they are inclusive and accessible to YP rather than being full of mystique or perceived to be off limits
8. Create a more cohesive, less competitive arts community where learning is pooled and where best practise was more easily shared
9. How to make the arts look cool rather than ‘good for you’
10. How to ensure that young people feel that the arts are theirs by right, and not by permission

The worked up ideas

1. Digital platform

In a nutshell

A flexible, digital platform that would be a listings tool to give young people access to all cool events and cultural opportunities in London

More on the idea

* A platform that is powered through a website but that would normally be accessed via Facebook or an app.
* Entries would be crowd sourced – i.e. anyone can feed events in, from users through to large organisations.
* Search facilities would be supple – can search by location (what’s near me now?); type (exhibition, theatre, music etc.); date (what’s happening today?); price (especially free!)
* Plenty of interactive opportunities – chat, ratings, on-the-go advice
* Could be funded through advertising and also by large organisations paying a levy to list
* Young people can join as members, giving them exclusive benefits and discounts
* Also, benefits can accrue for greater usage, a bit like Top Table
* More participative opportunities can be promoted – fellowships, apprenticeships etc.
* Could operate as a social enterprise style model, getting corporate sponsorship
* Would have a tonal quality of being a community/forum
* Would need plenty of endorsement from schools and relevant organisations

What are the challenges?

* The ‘dragons’ point out that young people don’t use websites, so it is vital to make the user experience fully functional through Facebook, Twitter and apps.
* There are also plenty of sites that offer similar aggregated information – so what will make this different?
* How well with this engage with those who aren’t engaged already? Will it just support those who are hooked into the arts?
* What will the brand name be?
* Who will run it?

1. Ensuring young people are represented within arts organisations in London

In a nutshell

* ensuring not only that they are represented at all levels but also in meaningful ways within organisations

More on the idea

* There are a couple of crucial benefits here:
  + More relevant programming
  + Getting committed young people involved in arts decision making from a young age
* There might be a website or app that publicises board opportunities to prevent this idea from being a hidden secret
* In addition to formal appointments, ensure that existing arts bodies make a practice of consulting with the youngest employees that they currently have to avoid the obvious blind spots that an older board might have
* Create a YP commissioning body with funds that they can allocate in order to give the idea some real power and authority

What are the challenges?

* The type of YP that could embrace such a role might be quite hard to find
* Even amongst the stakeholders on the table, there was not a unanimous buy-in to the idea, so a primary job is to build a more powerful case or vision of how this can work and more importantly, a more compelling vision of the benefits. At the moment, the challenge is that many stakeholders instinctively are drawn to the idea in principle but it’s not that easy to imagine how to realise it.
* Rather, the objective of having young people’s voices heard on the board, might be better served with another initiative – not having them actually on the board but hiring them to help develop and grow the different organisations using their creative skills rather than expecting business skills of them.

1. Increase the breadth of the cultural offer in schools

In a nutshell

* Arts organisations and schools to enter into partnerships on a specific challenge that would last for a year

More on the idea

* The key benefit is the prospect of creating genuine partnerships that have a lasting impact through the cross fertilisation of schools, young people and the arts that alters all of them for the better
* A secondary aim is to help drama (or indeed other arts subjects) get past being a chill out lesson – an injection of energy from outside raises its status and raises the bar inside schools
* From a teacher perspective, they are empowered to teach with extra passion
* There are plenty of opportunities to introduce fellowships, mentoring and secondments
* The partnership can run even deeper, by engaging with parents and local community groups
* Institute training for senior leaders and all teachers with the aim of helping them to see themselves as part of a body of cultural education professionals
* The training is open to all teachers across the span of the curriculum
* They would be incentivised with a variety of free offers and benefits (to be determined)
* The idea of the partnership would go much broader than just in terms of performance – more of the school curriculum could be touched by stretching out to finance, administration and marketing, helping to also build career skills as well as purely artistic ones

What are the challenges?

* How to engage whole schools in the idea?
* How to communicate the benefit to YP (or even define it)?

1. Ensuring that YP see the connection between the old and the new within the arts

In a nutshell

* Breaking down the barriers between the traditional arts establishment and the more youthful arts community

More on the idea

* Opening up venues and events in Central London with initiatives like YP passports
* Deliberate mixing up of the old and the new in single exhibitions
* Lobbying and campaigning to change perceptions, especially of the traditional arts (but perhaps this needs to cut both ways and encourage older people to come along to youth orientated arts events so that it’s about spectator mixing too?)
* Embracing pop up culture – ensure that all the space around established buildings is used for instant arts happenings.
* Broaden a sense of heritage – your chip shop is part of your cultural identity.

What are the challenges?

* The idea is easy to empathise with, but much harder to give shape and definition to, as the table debating it discovered. It would need a lot more work and brainstorming to do justice to the popularity of the broad concept.

Next steps

* On July 29th, the young people’s workshop will take these ideas and develop and refine them in more detail.
* In addition to critiquing the stakeholder ideas, the young people will have the explicit freedom to develop their own ideas if they think they can come up with things that unlock the barriers more fully.



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