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Abstract

This article reflects on a project, Make it Happen, that was a collaboration between a University and an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation (NPO). NPOs are organisations that are funded as part of a People and Places Consortium in the UK that increases access to the arts in areas of low participation. Additional resources came from Knowledge Exchange funding awarded by Research England via the University. The aim of the project was to create a curriculum that would be suitable for preparing local artists so they could have the skills to work in community arts or, as it is now known, socially-engaged practice. It was hoped that this would address a problem where there was a lack of artists from the local area who felt confident in applying for commissions for socially-engaged work. As a consequence, funding would go to arts practitioners from outside the area, and these people would not necessarily have the connections and insights to understand the needs and cultures of local communities. The Make it Happen team included a coordinator and a researcher from the University and the NPO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and a Creative Producer. A draft curriculum was then designed based on the knowledge and experience of the team's members. This was then trialed with a group of local artists (participants) who were recruited to undertake a three-week short course. The feedback and reflections from the participants and the project researcher were then examined through a theoretical lens developed from Bernstein's work on classification and framing in conjunction with Alhadeff-Jones' work on the rhythms of educational time. This enabled the researcher to explore the tensions that arose in the project around the competing temporalities of organisations and individuals.

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MAKE IT HAPPEN: DEVELOPING CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT THROUGH UNIVERSITY AND CHARITY COLLABORATION, DIFFERENT TEMPORALITIES AND RHYTHMS

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INTRODUCTION

This article reflects on a project, *Make it Happen*, that was a collaboration between a University and an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation (NPO). NPOs are organisations that are funded as part of a *People and Places Consortium* in the UK that increases access to the arts in areas of low participation. Additional resources came from Knowledge Exchange funding awarded by Research England via the University.

The aim of the project was to create a curriculum that would be suitable for preparing local artists so they could have the skills to work in community arts or, as it is now known, socially-engaged practice. It was hoped that this would address a problem where there was a lack of artists from the local area who felt confident in applying for commissions for socially-engaged work. As a consequence, funding would go to arts practitioners from outside the area, and these people would not necessarily have the connections and insights to understand the needs and cultures of local communities.

The *Make it Happen* team included a coordinator and a researcher from the University and the NPO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and a Creative Producer. A draft curriculum was then designed based on the knowledge and experience of the team's members. This was then trialed with a group of local artists (participants) who were recruited to undertake a three-week short course.

The feedback and reflections from the participants and the project researcher were then examined through a theoretical lens developed from Bernstein's work on classification and framing¹ in conjunction with Alhadeff-Jones' work on the rhythms of educational time.² This enabled the researcher to explore the tensions that arose in the project around the competing temporalities of organisations and individuals.

It was found that different stakeholders (University, NPO, Artist-Teachers, and participants) operated within different rhythms and temporalities. The course was positively received by the participants, the majority commenting that it did prepare them for undertaking socially-engaged practice. However, the feedback made references to time, pacing and sequencing, therefore it was suggested that an understanding of diverse temporalities should be explicitly included in any future curriculum for training artists to be socially-engaged practitioners.

CONTEXT

The project took place in an area of low participation in the arts. This was indicated by the previous research in 2011 that showed 52 percent of people in the area did not attend a single arts event during the previous year.³

In England the Lower layer Super Output Area (LSOA), is a measure of deprivation and includes the domains of income, employment, health, education and skills, housing and access to services, crime, and living environment.⁴ *Make it Happen* was undertaken in a place where 12.2 percent of its population lived in LSOAs which ranked within the worst 10 percent in England. This is higher than the average for England where 9.9 percent of the population are within the worst 10 percent of LSOAs. The local people identify with a range of ethnicities; 76.6 percent of the population identify as white British; the next largest groups are 9.9 percent identifying as Asian/Asian British (Pakistani) and 4.9 percent identifying as Asian/Asian British (Indian).⁵

There are few artists from the local area who have been trained to be socially-engaged practitioners and who are being commissioned to run projects with the local communities. Coinciding with this issue is a perceived lack in higher education of degree courses that focus particularly on socially-engaged practice. The *Creative People and Places* CEO argued that, “[In my view] there’s nowhere in the UK that teaches socially-engaged [arts] practice... which is bizarre because socially-engaged practice is the fastest growing and most significant element of how art practice is changing globally, yet the UK education system is not responding to that.”⁶

Community-based arts degree programmes ultimately can lead to just and sustainable societies where people and communities feel they belong and can contribute towards a greater good. However there have been many arts courses in the UK that have suffered from significant cuts.⁷ At the same time higher education’s engagement with community arts projects could be declining.⁸ Therefore, there is a need for additional opportunities to train in socially-engaged arts practice so that artists feel confident in working with people and communities. By developing the practitioners based in the locale this would ensure they had an empathy with and understanding of those with whom they were working as well as of the place in which the work was situated.

Theoretical Context

The theoretical context considers two approaches. Firstly, by drawing upon Bernstein’s classification and framing, questions can be asked about who has control over the content of the curriculum and how it is delivered. Secondly, Alhadeff-Jones’ work on developing rhythmic intelligence, enables a further analysis on who has control over the sequence, pace and rhythm of curricular delivery. This will aid an evaluation of how well the *Make it Happen* project enabled artists to be trained in socially-engaged practice.

Classification refers to **what**, framing is concerned with **how** [my emphasis] meanings are to be put together, the forms by which they are made public and the nature of the social relationships that go with it.⁹

Classification, the degree to which categories or subjects are insulated from each other, constructs the nature of social space, stratifications, distributions and locations. How is a curriculum organised; are the topics clearly delineated from each other or are they integrated as in an approach based on project work? Bernstein clarified that, “where we have strong classification, the rule is things must be kept apart. Where we have weak classification, the rule is these must be brought together.”¹⁰

Within a community arts organisation such as the NPO the numbers of workers tend to be small. This leads to the boundaries between job roles becoming fluid, as people often need to operate in more than one area therefore the classification between roles/tasks/ expertise is weak. For example, an artist could be also managing the social media accounts and the administration.

In a University where job roles are more clearly delineated and regulated, the boundaries are likely to be more impermeable and therefore, classification would be strong.

The difference in how the two organisations are classified might lead to tensions that could impact on the curriculum and how it was delivered. There may be a difference between educators from the two organisations about their beliefs on how the participants should be taught or trained.

Framing is the control of pedagogic communication, for example who controls the pace and sequencing of a curriculum? To what extent do students/learners/trainees have control over how they learn, when they learn and how quickly they learn? Where the role of teachers and learners is clearly delineated and teachers control how the content is to be learned, this would be seen as strong framing. However, if the learners can decide the pacing and sequencing of topics to suit themselves then this would be weak framing.

As Bernstein suggests, the “stronger the classification and the framing, the more the educational relationship tends to be hierarchical and ritualised...”¹¹ And this suggests a very teacher-centred approach.

Conversely, weak classification and framing could lead to educational relationships that appear more non-hierarchical and fluid, more student-centred rather than teacher-centred. However, control and power still operate in weakly classified and framed curricula through complex modes of interpersonal communication and implicit or explicit modes of evaluation.

One criticism of Bernstein’s approach is that it can appear that power relationships between social groups as well as teachers and learners are static and fixed. So, a development of these ideas could be to consider theories that try to evoke the complexities of time when looking at pacing and sequencing of content.

Alhadeff-Jones’ work around rhythmic intelligence introduces the notion that control over the timing, pacing and sequencing of curricula are in flux. From this perspective, educational processes, as well as the environments in which they evolve, are to be conceived as being in on-going motion.¹² Daily cycles and seasons punctuate the course programmes and these may or may not be in synergy with the biological and psychological rhythms of learners and teachers. Learning phases can be paced by schedules, timetables, calendar and social interactions, but who controls these mechanisms for regulating time - the learners, educators or managers?

METHOD

The aims of *Make it Happen* were to:

- Educate and inform participants on designing and delivering an interactive and community focused activity.
- Educate participants and provide them with experience of developing and presenting a project proposal in response to a site-specific brief.
- Seed and grow a creative network within the locale interested in and capable of delivering high quality engagement projects in the area.

Ten participants were recruited from the locality. They were artists, performers, writers and textile makers who were interested in developing their skills as socially-engaged practitioners. They were invited to take part in a short course (*Make it Happen Creatives Summer School*) and given a small bursary to pay for their travel and expenses.

The *Make it Happen* curriculum was devised by the project researcher and the Chief Executive Officer and Creative Producer of the NPO and included sessions on:

Preparing a budget, risk assessment, preparing a proposal, promoting socially-engaged practice, researching sites and communities, developing ideas for socially-engaged practice, reporting, evaluation, representation, documentation, co-construction, doing no harm, respect for the site, collaboration, diversity and inclusion, working and connecting with communities in an ethical way, cultural literacy, empathy, listening, care for self, participants, stakeholders, communities, sponsors and colleagues, and understanding the various contexts of socially-engaged practice.

The *Make it Happen* course took place during three days per week over three weeks in July 2022, resulting in participants presenting proposals for an outdoor and interactive art activity or an event for a local heritage open day. Artist-teachers – people who had extensive professional experience working in socially-engaged practice/community arts ran the course. University lecturers taught two

discrete sessions on participatory art and on poetry. The start and finish times 10.00-14.00 (British Summer Time) were carefully considered so that participants with caring responsibilities could drop off and pick up their children from school.

The pedagogical approach was based on working with a real site, where participants guided by the artist-teachers researched and tested ideas for socially-engaged practice. This activity culminated in a series of proposals for future projects that were pitched to the CEO, who evaluated them and gave feedback to the participants.

During the sessions the researcher observed the course and made field notes. The participants were then asked to give feedback on the course, reflecting on the impact the experience had had on them.

DISCUSSION

Feedback from the participants

The comments from the participants very often alluded to time. The *Make it Happen* project was seen to provide time where they could learn important skills that could have a benefit on their careers.

This has been an absolute game-changer for my career! Having the time, space and input from others to consider proposals has made such a difference in motivation, positivity and confidence, thank you!

Although the course was based on learning through doing, it also seems to have provided thinking time where people could reflect and contemplate. It also seems that the participants were surprised at how much they could learn in a relatively short amount of time.

I have learnt so much in a short space of time about an area I am new to.

The topics were sometimes seen to be covered in depth rather than superficially and it is positive that this could be done in nine days contact time.

I didn't realise the course would be this in depth, we covered an absolutely huge amount in such a short time.

A couple of the participants mentioned that the pace of the course was relaxed. This could mean the course felt informal or that the pace was comfortable; they did not feel pressured to meet a deadline.

I thought the course allowed us to touch upon all of the areas above in a relaxed fashion (with some topics having more dedication than others) meaning we had more of a scope of the thinking and necessities of socially engaging art practice, rather than concentrating a few topics and missing others.

Other participants noted a change in the pace of the course; that it may have become more pressured towards the end.

Overall a good course, I felt the start was relaxing and perhaps rushed towards the end to get the proposals ready.

Another participant commented both on the pace and the sequencing of *Make it Happen*.

Wonderful course – although seemed to slow down a little during the second week. I feel it would have been good to have had the brief earlier in the project.

The comments from the participants suggested that the rhythms, pacing and sequencing of the course were important issues for consideration. Of particular interest was the perception of time being at some points slow and relaxed and at other points rushed as pressure increased to meet the deadline.

Reflections on the temporalities of the stakeholders

The researcher reflected on how the University, the NPO, the artist-teachers and participants seemed to operate with different rhythms and conceptions of time. Table 1 represents the researcher's thoughts based upon working on the project with all these stakeholders.

Group/body	Pace	Sequence	Rhythm/episode	Control
University	Slow	Consistent Inflexible	Annual	Time-bound Controlled and controlling
NPO	Rapid	Inconsistent Flexible Open	Sporadic (opportunistic)	Controlling
Artist-teachers	Slow-fast	Inconsistent Flexible	Daily and weekly	Controlling and controlled
Participants	Fast and Slow	Habituated Interrupted	Daily, sporadic	Controlled

Table 1. Stakeholders' Rhythms and Temporalities

The rhythms, pacing and sequencing of the different stakeholders were entangled and vying for control over the concept and use of time in the project.

The University as the gatekeeper of the funding did have some control over the timings of the activities. However, its control was not absolute as it needed to have completed the project within one academic year to comply with the conditions of the external funder. Also, its policies and regulations needed to be complied with, resulting in processes being slow, consistent and inflexible. This has some congruence with the assessment of the University being a strongly classified and framed organisation.

Conversely, the NPO worked at a rapid pace and was quick to change the sequence of activities and topics as opportunities and challenges arose. This approach from the point of view of the University led to difficulties in sticking to agreed plans and a breakdown in communication when activities changed. This more fluid and adaptive understanding of time was in keeping with the notion that the NPO was weakly classified and framed. Ultimately the NPO had a large amount of control of the project, because it was subject to its own policies and regulations that allowed for a more sporadic way of working.

The artist-teachers who delivered the course had most control of the sequencing and pacing of the curriculum. They were able to set the pace which changed depending on what outcomes they wanted to gain from the learning activities. But they also needed to comply with the deadline so that the participants could present their work to the CEO in good time. Their planning was in relation to the days and weeks of the project. The schedules for individual days were changed and adapted depending on how the learning activities were received by the participants or based on environmental factors due to working outside at the site. This way of working was well described by the participants when they commented about the course being slow at some points and rushed at others.

The participants had least overall control; they were working within the time constraints that had been set by the artist-teachers, the NPO and the University. They also needed to align the rhythms, pacing and sequencing of the course with their lives outside the programme. So, for example, the rhythms of picking up children from school, or visiting an aging parent or going to a part-time job, or catching a train to arrive home on time could be disrupted or interrupted by the rhythms of *Make it Happen*. It could be argued that the course appeared to be weakly classified and framed. There was a degree of informality where the participants had a level of control over the sequence and pacing of the course, however, they were still subject to the relatively powerful position of the artist-teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

The course, from the point of view of the participants appears to have been very positive. They felt they learned more than they expected in a relatively short amount of time. It is possible that the learning was superficial rather than in depth, but this did not come through in the feedback. The point that the stakeholders operated with different rhythms and temporalities does not seem to have impacted on the outcomes for the participants.

There were some nuances reported in the pacing and sequencing of the curriculum where participants reported the course feeling relaxed and at times rushed. This suggested that control oscillated between participants and the artist-teachers. It must be remembered that the participants were subject to the temporalities of many different organisations and agents, and it is a testament to them that they were able to manage their time successfully.

There was some sensitivity to the temporal needs of the participants in the planning where the whole week was not taken up with the course (only three days). Also, the contact time was carefully planned so that the participants could meet their life responsibilities outside the course.

Those who control the rhythms and temporalities of others ultimately have power over them and this is a social justice issue.¹³ As the *Make it Happen* course was about training artists and creative practitioners to work with marginalised communities then perhaps the curriculum should have contained some explicit discussion about respecting the temporalities of others when planning socially-engaged practice.

The project suggests that there are some theoretical synergies that can be made between Bernstein's theories on classification and framing and Alhadeff-Jones work on developing rhythmic intelligence. This approach suggests that when planning inclusive socially-engaged projects artists and educators should not assume that everyone has the same experiences and concepts of time.

NOTES

- ¹ Basil Bernstein, *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control, and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique (Vol. 5)* (Oxford: Rowan and Littlefield, 2020).
- ² Michel Alhadeff-Jones, *Time and the Rhythms of Emancipatory Education: Rethinking the Temporal Complexity of Self and Society* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 2017).
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- ³ "Impactful Insights: A Data-Driven Approach to Audience Development," Creative Scene, accessed June 08, 2023, <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/impactful-insights-a-data-driven-approach-to-audience-development/>
- ⁴ Gemma Catney, Christopher D. Lloyd, Mark Ellis, Richard Wright, Nissa Finney, Stephen Jivraj, and David Manley, "Ethnic diversification and Neighbourhood Mixing: A Rapid Response Analysis of the 2021 Census of England and Wales," *The Geographical Journal* 189 (2023). doi: [10.1111/geoj.12507](https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12507).
- ⁵ "Kirklees Factsheets 2020: Intelligence and Performance," Kirklees Council, accessed June 08, 2023, <https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/information-and-data/pdf/kirklees-factsheets.pdf>
- ⁶ "Talent Development for Socially Engaged Practice," Creative people and places [CPP], accessed June 08, 2023, <https://dokumen.tips/documents/talent-development-for-socially-engaged-practice-socially-engaged-art-practice.html?page=1>
- ⁷ Jonathan Lilliedahl, "Is there a Transnational Trend of "Nudging" Away from the Arts? How the Selection Device Works in The European–Swedish Context," *Arts Education Policy Review* 124 (2021).
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- ⁸ Dany Louise, "Why are universities scrapping their community arts projects?" *The Guardian*, May 02, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/may/02/why-are-universities-scrapping-their-community-arts-projects>
- ⁹ Bernstein, *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control, and Identity*, 12.
- ¹⁰ Bernstein, 11.
- ¹¹ Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control: Vol. 1. Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language* (Boston, Massachusetts: Routledge & Kegan Paul Books), 376.
- ¹² Alhadeff-Jones, *Time and the Rhythms of Emancipatory Education*.
- ¹³ Elizabeth F. Cohen, *The Political Value of Time: Citizenship, Duration, and Democratic justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

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