



RESEARCH KEY FINDINGS 2024/5

THE
MILDRED
FUND

Mildred Fund Research Consultant | Anna Cutler

The Mildred Fund builds young people's personal, social and creative confidence through art. It supports visual art institutions to work with schools and community groups to provide 13-to-19-year-olds with creative skills for them to thrive.

www.mildredfund.org

Photo: Alex Williams. Camden Art Centre

1. IMPACT IS BUILT FROM FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Meaningful engagement is built on long-term relationships: Sustained, consistent relationships between organisations, artists, schools, and community groups are key for young people. Trust and belonging grow over time.

Flexible and inclusive approaches drive success: Adapting to the specific needs, rhythms, and interests of young people (including those with complex needs) improves engagement. Flexible timing, welcoming environments, and participant choice are key.

Resisting norms: Resisting transmission-led mainstream educational practices and replacing these with those that are student-led and exploratory opens up new and unexpected learning opportunities as well as positive experiences for young people.

Ongoing reflection is crucial: Regular reflection, responsiveness to changing needs, and an enquiry-led approach support improvement for both staff and participants. Additional focus and insight are gained by staff and students who are involved directly in the research.

2. ATTENTIVENESS

Attentiveness is complex and essential: Attentiveness goes beyond listening to include deep noticing, and responsiveness. It includes creating supportive environments, addressing individual needs, and fostering a sense of care and understanding.

Attentiveness enables young people to feel seen, heard, and trusted: This quality underpins positive changes in confidence, belonging, agency and connection.

Attentiveness extends to the whole ecology: It is not only about supporting young people and those working across the project, including artists, staff, and educators. It also extends to the use of space, time, content and method within each programme.

3. INCLUSION AND AGENCY

Inclusivity redefines progress: Positive outcomes are recognised in small shifts, such as attendance, quiet engagement, or trying something new, not just in visible achievements.

Co-production and agency matter: Projects that give young people a sense of agency, whether through co-design, shared decision-making, or leadership opportunities, develop stronger engagement and deeper impact.

Young people as co-researchers: Young people gain additional value from programmes when they are involved in the research. They not only understand and reflect on what they have done and how they feel, but also what it means and why it has value.

4. CREATIVE PRACTICE OUTCOMES

Wellbeing is both an individual and collective primary outcome: This expanded definition of wellbeing balances personal aspects (focus, calm, agency) with social aspects (connection, collaboration, sense of community). Collective wellbeing grows through attentiveness and shared care among all participants.

Creative confidence, belonging, and connection are primary outcomes: Across all organisations, projects displayed increases in self-confidence, a sense of belonging, and social/creative connections for young people. Art is a conduit for these outcomes.

Skills-building has two dimensions: Two benefits arise from building skills with young people. These include both the explicit skills, e.g. learning techniques in clay, radio, photography, and implicit, e.g. developing soft skills such as collaboration, communication, and creative decision-making.

Art has a transformative role: Thoughtful, open-ended and creative activities in a diversity of forms provide safety, agency, and new ways for young people to express themselves and connect with others. A range of artistic forms and content offers greater opportunities for personal and collective experimentation.

Art rewilds young people's attention (see blog on Attentiveness and the Rewilding of Attention): Young people's attention is refocused, reignited and redistributed through diverse arts practices, encouraging original, independent, and collaborative thinking, while also challenging norms and unlocking free thinking.

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