

# Serpentine Galleries Education World Without Walls Programme Initial Research and Evaluation Report

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## Summary of Interim Findings

Emerging evidence suggests that Serpentine Galleries' World Without Walls projects have, among other things, been successful in:

- Developing trusting and sustainable relationships with a local schools and Children's Centre
- Developing projects that combine aesthetic principles, art-making, pedagogic and broad social purposes
- Tailoring projects to meet the needs and aspirations of the school and Centre through the commissioning of artists as well as in the design and development of projects
- Promoting the fullest possible participation of children in the school and Children's Centre
- That children seem to have enjoyed the experience of participation
- That both Moving Up and Changing Play have appeared to contribute to children's individual and social learning and development

## Introduction

This brief report is the first in a series on the Serpentine Galleries' 'World Without Walls' (WWW) programme, looking at 'Changing Play' and 'Moving Up', two projects that come under the programme's umbrella. Its purpose is to reflect on initial and interim findings from the first three months of a research and evaluation project, commissioned by Serpentine Galleries Education Department in March 2016, that will continue until January 2018.

Two main objectives, set out by Serpentine Galleries education team, drive the research:

- Articulating and identifying the benefits of the WWW programme for all its participants – children, families, staff, artists and Serpentine Galleries
- To promote the development, sustainability and resilience of the WWW programme beyond 2017.

Working at the interface of arts and educational practice, the WWW project aims to promote the development of positive and constructive relationships between galleries, artists, children and young people, their families, schools and wider communities through participatory arts projects. Central to the approach, Education curators are keen to promote socially engaged, participatory arts projects that:

- Are child and young person centred
- Engage with families
- Contribute to local communities.

A main purpose of reporting on the WWW research and evaluation project is to contribute to and influence policy in the fields of the arts and education, both for Serpentine Galleries in its area of operations and with relevance to wider fields of arts and education practice.

## Approach to research and evaluation

Researchers commissioned for the evaluation of WWW – Professor Pat Thomson and Dr Anton Franks, based in a specialist arts and creativity research centre, Centre for Arts, Creativity and Literacies (CRACL @ <https://cracl.net/>) at the School of Education, University of Nottingham – have long experience in researching in the arts and education.

The approach to research and evaluation taken here is participatory, drawing heavily from dialogue with Serpentine Galleries education curators and with project participants. Initial designs for research were modified as the work progressed through discussion between participants, before and during the Changing Play and Moving Up projects, adapting to the particular time-frames and development of each project.

The focus is on *processes* as well as outcomes, both education and arts outcomes, that emerge and develop in events and interactions over time. A dialogue driven approach to evaluation is to give a rounded view, drawing from multiple perspectives provided the various participants – children, young people, artists, school and centre staff. The approach to research can be characterised as positive and constructive – that is, looking for ways that engagement in Serpentine Galleries’ WWW programme enhances and augments the experience and development of participants.

To date, we have seen two projects. Methods of generating evidence for evaluation of the Changing Play and Moving Up commissions have included:

- Pre-project discussion with the Serpentine education team
- Pre- and post-project interviews with artists leading each project
- Observation of and participation in selected sessions of each project, involving brief discussion with artists and education curators through the post-session reflections
- Participation in discussions initiated by the artist leading Changing Play with children’s centre staff after sessions

- Interviews with teachers and a focus group with children after the completion of Moving Up
- Online survey of children's responses after the Moving Up project (n=70 of 90 participating children).

## Interim findings

### Dialogue, negotiation and collaboration

A distinctive aspect of both projects is the way that Education curators set up and planned projects through *dialogue* with Gateway Academy for Moving Up and Portman Children's Centre.

Negotiation between the Education curators and key staff at centres participating in the projects have established solid and trusting relationships, such that staff in both the School and the Children's Centre expressed the desire to participate in the work of the Galleries in the future.

Dialogue with key staff orientated the work of the Education team, tailoring the projects, allowing them to commission artists with experience of working with children and young people in particular forms of work.

In both projects, Serpentine Galleries Education Curators, Alex Thorp and Ben Messih, were fully committed and active participants, working sensitively with children, young people, the artists and staff.

Participation enabled the Education team to facilitate dialogue, encouraging ongoing reflection and modification as projects progressed.

Processes of reflection and modification developed a strong sense of the projects as *process-based*, allowing a sense of direction and progression towards objectives.

The direction and nature of activities were informed and underpinned by a framework of developing coherent ideas (more details in later reports) – in the process of the Changing Play project, for example, Education curators shared particular and relevant papers with the artist.

A key idea and principle underpinning the development and progress of the both Changing and Play was that the arts work should as much as possible be guided and led by the children and young people.

Alongside the collaborative and child-centred orientation of the projects, the aesthetics principles behind their ways of working their work, together with their particular approaches to art-making, fed into very specific and distinctive artistic-led approaches to pedagogy. Such approaches might be recognised as 'signature pedagogies' (Thomson et al., 2012, Schön, 1991)<sup>1</sup>. Further and deeper exploration and exposition of pedagogic approaches of projects alongside the development of aesthetic principles underlying the work are worth pursuing in more detail as they appear to be central to World Without Walls projects:

- What principles underlie the project from the Galleries' and Education curators' purposes and how might these be described?
- What research and theory might be applied to support, explain and develop principles and approaches in the future?
- How can principles and approaches be developed and communicated to artists and participating groups and institutions?
- How might the underlying pedagogy be extended beyond the boundaries of specific projects and taken up by schools and centres?

Both artists reported in post-project interviews that the level of engagement of and collaboration with curators was in their experience

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<sup>1</sup> [www.signaturepedagogies.org.uk](http://www.signaturepedagogies.org.uk)

distinctive. Collaborative artistic enterprise and exploration was evident in and across both projects.

The ways in which collaboration is negotiated and developed is worth documenting in more detail as it may be germane to the sustainability question. Questions that might be addressed by the Serpentine Education team include:

- What principles underpin the commissioning process?
- What is made 'non-negotiable' at the outset?
- What preferred practices are made explicit to the artist?
- What are the points at which curators intervene?
- What strategies do they use to shape the process of a project as it goes along?

In both observed projects, there is clearly potential for projects to be adapted to different groups and contexts and repeated in modified form in the future. Both Changing Play and Moving Up were documented by the artists, the Education team and the researcher, so there may be potential in some form of publication so that approaches might be available wider application in the future. It will be important to consider the specific language that might be used in such documentation.

### **Benefits for participants**

There is a strong ethos of constructive social engagement evident in the ways that projects are set up, commissioned and developed.

Emerging evidence from research strongly suggests that Changing Play and Moving Up projects afforded resources and ways of working that, in specific and different ways, augmented the work of both Gateway Academy and Portman Children's Centre (see below).

## Changing Play

**Participants: Nursery children**

**Location: Portman Children's Centre**

**Artist: Albert Potrony**

In broad terms, the artist commissioned for the project, Albert Potrony, works with groups to produce collaboratively constructed environments, or installations, and sees his work as being 'participatory' and 'social image practice'. He had previously worked with young children, although not as young as Nursery children, e.g. in drop-in sessions at the Tate with parents in attendance.

For Changing Up, he provided a range of materials and objects, some from the Scrap Project, but others bought from builders' merchants, including: sheets of foam (shaped and with holes cut in), corrugated PVC sheeting, nylon cord, clips, reflective insulating material, tube foam insulation, large sheets of corrugated card, PVC mirror shapes, LED lamps (that fitted into holes cut in foam)...

Materials chosen and adapted by the artist provided an enriched play environment, augmenting the play resources of the Children's Centre to stimulate a range of imaginative play activities.

The choices presented (children could choose if, when and how they wanted to engage in play with materials) and the openness of the play environment in the richness of materials offered, afforded many opportunities for individual and social development for the children. Benefits were perceived as well for the artist, the Children's Centre staff, the institution as a whole and Serpentine's Education curators.



The project was nicely open-ended (as is children's play) and developed as it progressed, centrally drawing from the responses of the children alongside observational insights into their play made by the artist, Albert Potrony, Children Centre's staff (including teachers, helpers and the Centre's Director) and Education Curators, Alex Thorp and Ben Messih.

Changing Play sessions involved:

- The laying out of materials and objects, either in the Nursery interior, or in the exterior play space. Ultimately, weather permitting, the outside play area was seen as the most productive space
- Adapting, adding or taking away objects and materials, removal of existing play equipment in the outdoor play space
- Taking images of the children at play and attaching Go-Pro video cameras to a few willing children at some points
- The artist reviewing images with individual children, encouraging them to tell stories about what was going on. At first, the artist experimented with this, inviting children to talk to him on a carpeted area inside the Nursery, whilst others continued playing. In a later session, he invited individual children with their teacher into a small room, showing them a set of images in which the children featured and asking them to choose images and to talk to him about what was going on. These sessions were voice-recorded.



For **children**, benefits appear to be:

- Awareness and understanding of a range of materials and object and manipulative skills in handling large and small materials and objects and ability to conceptualise them in form and use
- Imaginative development in the interaction with materials, objects and other children, allowing experimentation in applying and combining of materials.
- Linguistic development in the use of words, utterances and in the construction of narratives accompanying play and reflecting on it afterwards is essential in early conceptual development (Vygotsky, 1994, Vygotsky, 1978, Piaget, 1962).
- The richness of children's narratives incorporated their understanding of social relations and responses to immediate and mediated culture – many instances of children making references to familiar media characters (notably Power Rangers) and to their

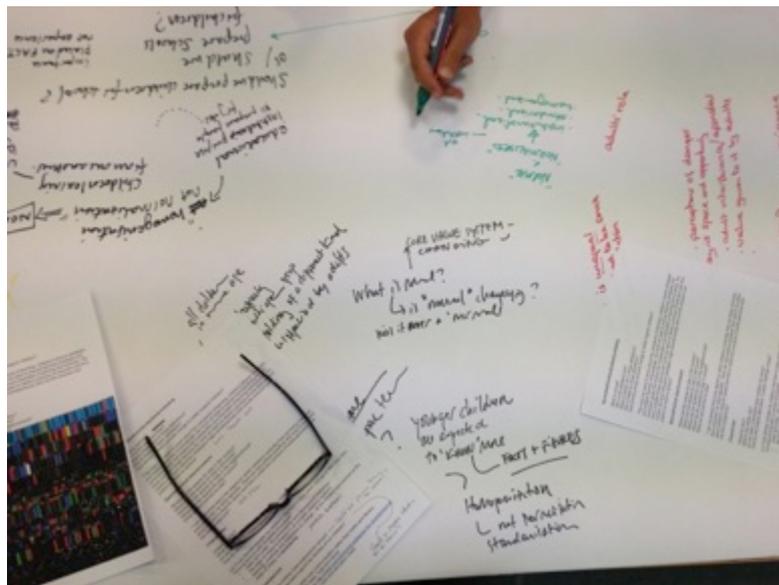
experience of social and cultural life (home life, rockets, putting people in prison) (Marsh, 2000)

- The ability to 'read' materials and objects – to name things in their playworld and to construct complex narratives adapting them to their imaginative purposes – are powerful precursors of literacy development
- Looking at the images the artist had taken of the children in play and then reflecting on them later, interpreting them and making narratives assisted the development of memory
- Continuity and consistency in working regularly with a particular group of children – the original plan was to work both with the Nursery and with a drop-in parent and toddler group, 'Stay and Play', but after reflection and discussion with staff this was modified to concentrate on working with the Nursery children
- Particularly apparent was children's increasing sense of autonomy in the playworlds they created, affording them a clearer sense of their own developing character and personhood for themselves and in relation to others. Children were able to lead adults into and through their imaginative worlds, involving them in their play



For **staff and the Children's Centre** as a whole, benefits included opportunities:

- With the artist leading activities either to join in with, or to observe children at play whilst relinquishing some of the responsibilities to provide materials and lead activity
- To observe aspects and capacities of each that they had not had the opportunity to see before
- To be the subject of children's play, often adorned with objects and materials by the children and sometimes to be 'imprisoned' by them
- To observe children working and playing with a variety of objects and materials, testing their capacities
- To engage with colleagues, the artist and Education curators in reflective discussion after the play sessions, developing their understanding of children, wondering at their imagination and feeding suggestions



- The Head of the Children's Centre and her staff clearly value the relationship with Serpentine Galleries – a display of work with the Serpentine is prominent in the Reception area



For the **artist**, perceived benefits included:

- Developing greater understanding of working with children in the early years as the project progressed, getting to know and develop a relationship with a particular group of children
- Opportunities for developing approaches to working with young children through reflective discussion with and from readings provided by Education curators and from discussion with Children's Centre staff
- Developing awareness about the provision of materials and their adaptation to purpose – that 'less is more'. As the project progressed, there was a realisation that the careful selection and provision of fewer materials assists in generating more creative playing opportunities
- In experimenting with providing materials in interior and exterior spaces for play, a developing awareness of the limitations, affordances and significance of space have effects on creative play, particularly in relation to the gendering of specific interior and exterior spaces
- Deeper insights into the benefits of working in close collaboration with curators and Centre staff for reflecting on and developing work
- The opportunity to work on the 'mystery' and 'chaos' of working with young children, learning how to make sense of the process.

## **Moving Up**

**Participants: Children in Year 6, Gateway Academy**

**Venue: Cockpit Theatre**

**Artist: Adam James**

This was the third year that Education curator Alex Thorp had been working with Gateway Academy on Moving Up, a project designed to help Year 6 students think about and prepare for their transition to secondary school. Clear advantages were perceived by teachers in terms of the development of understanding, continuity and, ultimately, trust that the project would benefit the children in assisting transition.

In interview with Gateway's Head of Year 6 (the contact teacher), it was apparent that the Education team select artists and inform project design drawing closely from teachers' understanding of the perceived needs and preferred ways of working of their particular cohort of children.

In 2015, for example, children worked with a dancer and the project venue was located in the school's own hall. For the 2016 project, the teachers felt that the current Year 6 children enjoyed and responded well to drama-based work. Because a majority of students in the school have English as an additional language and a variety of different 'home languages', drama is perceived by teachers to be helpful in developing children's language and communication capacities.

Choosing the venue was guided by experience and informed by discussion with school staff. It was decided to locate the project away from the school at the nearby Cockpit Theatre (less than five minutes walk from the school), as experience had shown the previous year's project, located in the school hall, had meant that the flow of the project was subject to interruption and distraction.

The artist, Adam James, is interested in 'using [his] body as a means of generating an image'. His work has progressed to body-work with groups as an 'artist facilitator or director', leading him to be interested game-based structures derived from Nordic forms of Live Action Role Play

(LARP) methods (the Nordic approach is orientated toward social pedagogy, contrasting with other more sci-fi/fantasy-based role-playing games). Previously, he had worked with groups of primary school children at the Turner Contemporary.

**Moving Up** ran over two sessions with each group (there were three separate groups of around 30 children in each) at the Cockpit Theatre, a black box studio space with most seating retracted for the sessions. Adam James was assisted by James Harper who has drama training and runs a theatre company – they met through their common interest in Nordic LARP. Both Education curators participated alongside the children, whilst accompanying teachers and teaching assistants were also encouraged to join in – some opting in fully, others partially.

### **Session 1 outline:**

The studio floor was marked out with four coloured circles, each containing a heap of tee-shirts of the same colour.



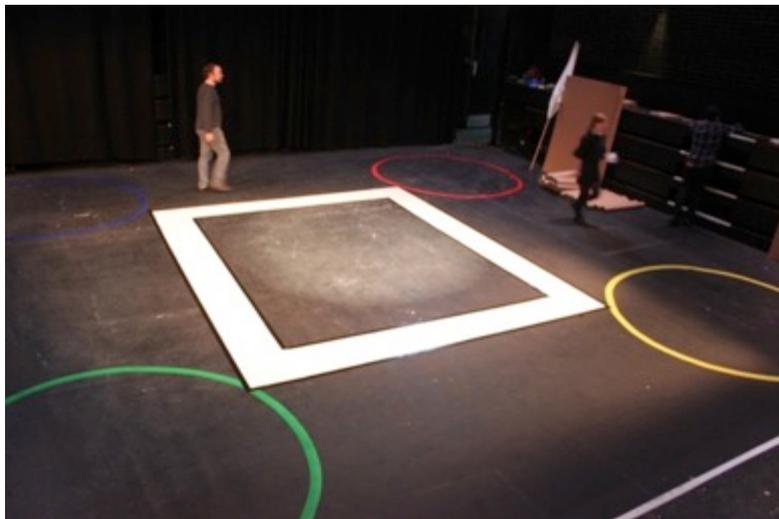
Around the edge of the studio, small sheets of paper were laid out, each showing an abstract symbol, symbols used by American hobos, chosen because of their abstract nature and presumed lack of any existing connotation for the children.

- Introduction to participants and outline of session
- Warm-up activities – running around shaking hands, pairs making 'body sculptures'

- Selecting images from around the room that represent something of how the children were feeling about the future
- Making groups by sharing images and looking for commonalities – groups take on a particular coloured shirt
- Making 'creatures' in groups
- Making the creatures move
- Giving the creatures voices (without words)
- Combining movement and sound
- Constructing imaginary 'gifts' to present to other groups
- Exchanging gifts
- Ritual activity to take them out of the game and out of their roles
- Reflective discussion on the sequence of activity, investigating the connections between the activities and moving to secondary school

### **Session 2 outline:**

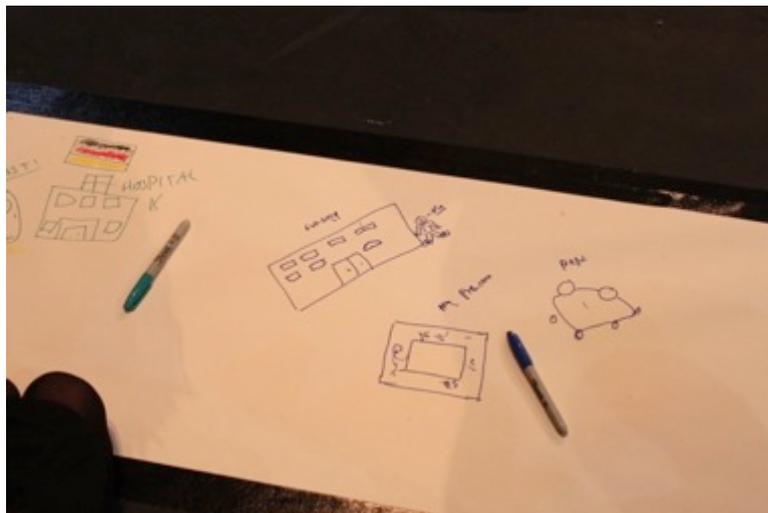
When the children enter, the studio is again laid out with four coloured circles, this time with a rectangle in the centre of the space marked out with paper. Adjacent to the circles are trays of materials, each set different, covered with a piece of canvas



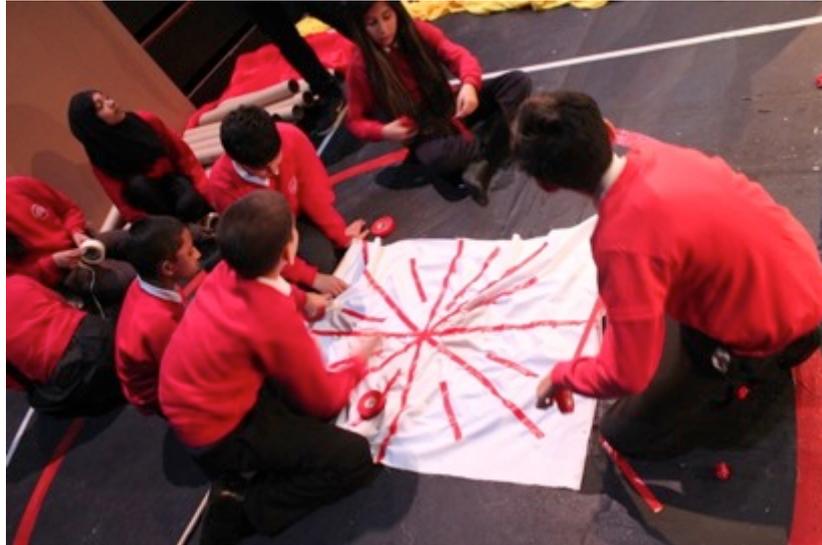
- The session begins with children gathered around the central rectangle and the artist making a narrative link to Session 1, saying that time has passed and the creatures have evolved into communities with its set of rules and ways of living. The purpose of the session is for the children to build a shelter together



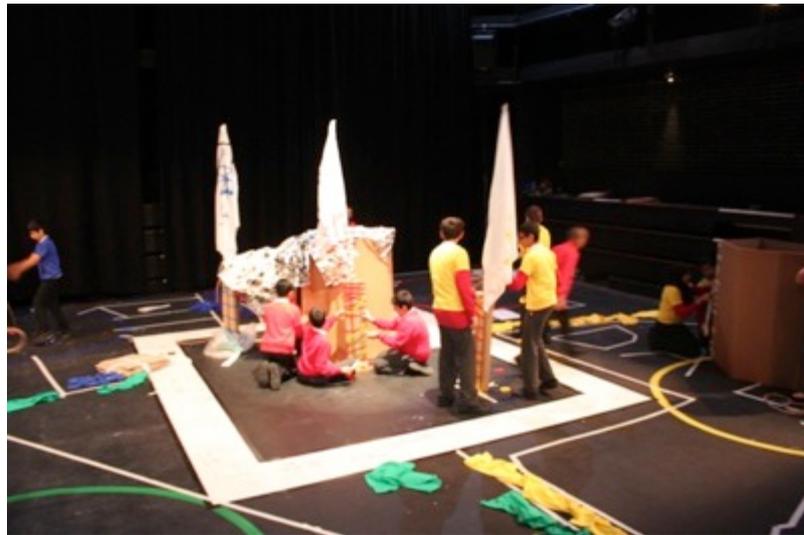
- Students are asked to choose a section of paper in the central rectangle to draw themselves in their future school



- They are then asked to reform their groups from Session 1 and to occupy their group's coloured circle. In the first session, students are asked not to speak but to come up with a set of gestures for a sign language – in later sessions, they are allowed to talk
- Groups make a community flag, applying coloured tape to a prepared blank flag. In later sessions, they are asked to reflect on different aspects of their communities



- Each group is asked to construct a shelter in their area, using the materials they are provided with and to barter with other groups for materials they might want
- At the end of the first run of Session 2, children are then asked to make a common structure in the centre of the studio, inside the rectangle. In later sessions, they don't construct a common shelter in order to spend more time in reflective discussion
- Time is given for ample reflection in pairs, small groups and plenary at the end of the session



For the **children**, benefits appeared to include:

- Opportunities to think about what was important to them in moving to a new school
- Role-play activities within a game structure provided children with a way to think through potentially sensitive issues. Results of the survey suggest that, as may be expected, most children felt a mixture of nervousness and excitement about the prospect of secondary transfer
- Issues that most children identified were about (in order of priority) making new friends, working collaboratively and adjusting to a new

environment. Good evidence, therefore, that children understood the point of the activity

- In recognising that overarching purposes were being addressed through the game structure and role play, children clearly understood the power of metaphorical structures as a way of thinking things through creatively and productively
- For most, as observed in situ and reported by the children, the sessions were an enjoyable way to think through these issues in action. Most enjoyable for the majority of children was the opportunity to make things, to be creative in the making of creatures and shelters
- From observation, it was apparent that children were exercising and stretching their expressive and communicative capacities through words, gestures and choreographed movement. Reflective discussion contributed to their ability to conceptualise their experiences in the sessions and relate them to their everyday lives. One of the teachers reported in interview that the children had spontaneously led reflection on the project when they returned to school.
- Over the course of sessions, children's ability to work collaboratively was clearly enhanced. Although there were clearly moments of tension (as observed and as surfaces in some responses in the survey), the metaphorical games structure and process meant that children were for the most part able to navigate and resolve tension constructively.
- Moving Up sessions apparently enhanced children's confidence and sense of well-being as the sessions progressed, albeit that this is from observation and implicit in children's responses in the survey and focus group.
- We note, however, that research suggests that observation of this kind of self-confidence is context specific and its transferability is difficult to establish and assess. It is therefore likely that the major benefit was that Moving Up presented an opportunity to think in a more concentrated public and reflective way about going to another place and school transfer.

- The children generally expressed less enthusiasm for the writing activities associated with the project. This is something that might be worth thinking about, as writing is a helpful practice. Artists may need some support to make writing less 'school like' and more obviously like the practice they use themselves.

For the **school and its teachers**, benefits appear to have included:

- Continuity of and trust in relationship with an outside cultural institution such as the Serpentine that is perceived to be beneficial, particularly in the way that the school perspective and teachers' understanding of the children fed into the project through negotiation and collaboration. Teachers were particularly complimentary about the relationship with Serpentine Galleries' Education curators.
- Evidence from the children and the teachers that the project was successful in helping most children to think positively and constructively about their move to secondary school in a creative way that differed from normal curricular activities. Teachers are always concerned for children's well-being at this crucial stage of schooling and the feeling from them was that, overall, Moving Up helped them feel more positive about transfer to secondary.
- Teachers valued the active and creative approach and the opportunity afforded to develop learning outside the classroom. The week before, the children had sat national tests and Moving Up was seen as a purposeful but enjoyable way of providing the children with a more open-ended and active outlet.

For the **artist**, benefits included opportunities:

- To make a funded project toward specific (pedagogic) objectives – a new experience for Adam James
- To work in a space dedicated to performance of different kinds, complete with its facilities for spatial lay-outs, lighting and its sense of isolation from other environments

- To develop a project with the participation and collaboration of Serpentine Education Curators Alex Thorp and Ben Messih through an ongoing process of dialogue through the project
- From such collaboration, to treat the project as a process of refining structures and activities. Participatory, interactive performance art, particularly but not exclusively with children and young people, is always unpredictable, subject to parameters.

Adam James reported learning much from the project with a lot left to ponder that broadly and indicatively include: developing more clarity in the objectives of particular sessions and projects, towards the overall aim of promoting positive and constructive change; achieving a balance between tight planning, open-endedness and experimentation in planning projects; ways of setting boundaries and establishing rules with children to promote progression and safety but without limiting creativity.

### **Possible ways forward**

Although this is an early report, based on provisional and interim findings, the perceived positive and constructive make a case for the continued development and the sustainability of the World Without Walls programme. As has been indicated above, the resilience and sustainability of the programme might be promoted through:

- Continuing to discuss, define and develop principles and overarching ethos explicitly and coherently, perhaps in the development of accessible strategy documents designed to communicate appropriately (and in appropriate forms) to different audiences – children, young people, artists, schools and children’s centres
- Sustaining communications and developing existing relationships with schools, children’s centres and their communities in the design, commissioning and operation of projects in the future
- Using published documentation to disseminate and publicise projects in wider communities of practice, including other potential

partners and participants as well as cultural organisations and funding agencies

- Developing regional, national and international networks that connect with similar work out of galleries and museums

As the programme continues, the researchers will continue to work and dialogue with Serpentine Galleries' Education Curators to refine the focus and deepen areas of research.

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